

The Bears Claw





THE BEAR'S CLAWS



"There, he's going down; now look!"

[Page 49]

The Bear's Claws

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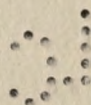
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To the Other Two
Jim and Ida

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The Bear's Claws

CHAPTER I

JUDY

AT one end of the mezzanine balcony that encircles the rotunda of a New York hotel is an ornate bronze cage. In this cage they keep a stenographer—not the official stenographer, but a casual typist for the convenience of guests. Like the bronze cage, she is more often ornamental than of any apparent use in the scheme of things, for downstairs are two pushing and accessible young women to whom most of the business letters accrue. But now and then a quiet-loving man wanders upstairs, bringing her his correspondence to type; or, more rarely, a woman slips in with letters to copy; and thus the wolf is kept from the door of the bronze cage.

It is not a lucrative position. There are in it neither glory nor rich returns, but many somnolent, idle hours; and it was because of these idle hours that it exactly suited Judy Gray.

For there were two of Judy Gray. One of her was a stenographer, rather small and pale, resigned to captivity in the bronze cage, with nimble fingers and a little flickering, impersonal smile for a customer, with tired, sea-green eyes, and hair that might have crowned her with a coronet like satiny beech leaves had she not been too preoccupied and too indifferent to care for it.

The other one of her saw visions.

At these times, although she sat behind her typewriter, staring straight down the red velvet vista of the mezzanine balcony to the clanging elevator doors, she was conscious of no detail of the scene. Her pale face would grow vivid, her gray-green eyes widen, the pupils distending and growing brilliant, the irises changing to violet with little flecks of fire in

them. Her hands would be clenched in her lap, and her breath would be held lest the vision fail her, the divine fire flicker out before she could catch and revel in its glow. In these moments she looked not at all like Miss Gray, the typist. And for the moment she was not Miss Gray. She was the audience, the sole onlooker at a tremendous drama. The theater was the world and the drama was Adventure. Her own brain supplied the stage setting, the book of the play, the actors, and the thunder. She was both audience and stage director.

As pictures unroll from a cinematograph, there passed before her mind's eye strange countries and sinister seas; men fighting and weapons gleaming; bandits and buccaneers and rocking skies—a curious kind of vision for a girl to be seeing! First they would come as out of a fog, higgledy-piggledy, a coral reef alongside a Northern fjord, a Chinese pirate on the heels of a British midshipman, lost treasure crowding spoils of war. Then, as she watched, order and form would come out of

chaos, the actors trooped to their places — and a story would be born.

Only her friends among the bellboys knew there were two of Judy Gray. They carried about in their pockets certain tattered tales — *A Mystery of the Solomon Islands*, and *Wreckers' Reef*, were their favorites — all signed "J. Gray." They were wont to smooth out these worn pages with a proud hand as they explained the mysteries of authorship.

"She dopes 'em all out herself," Number Nine would say. "Yes, sir! right off the bat! I've seen her writin' 'em. Sure, you can take this one, but you've gotta bring it back, see? For I helped to write that story, in a way — she told me how it was goin' to end!"

Number Nine would then walk circumspectly past the bronze cage, peeling a wistful glance at J. Gray. If she gazed with big, unseeing eyes straight ahead of her, he would go on his way softly, warning off a new boy that would fain have hailed her. But if she sat alone and obviously uninspired, nibbling

pensively at the end of a pencil, he would stop by her typewriter for some little talk of pearl rivers, of smugglers, and false lights, of adventures by sea and caravan, until the necessities of a workaday world forced him back to the post of duty.

She was not a genius, working in obscurity, to burst presently full-fledged upon a startled world. She never used the phrase "my art"; her thoughts never hovered enviously over the list of best sellers; what she produced was not literature, and she knew it. But it stirred even the blasé blood of the bellboys; for deep in Judy Gray was a vivid sense of life, of color and movement, and a hunger seldom found in the heart of a girl for the highways of the world, for the free wind that blows down the aisles of the sea, for the far corners of heathen lands. She saw visions because of this hunger; and she wrote to feed it.

And every day from nine to five she breathed the overheated air of the mezzanine balcony in the Great Southern Hotel; and every eve-

ning from six to nine she shivered in the clammy privacy of a boarding-house bedroom; and the wanderlust in her soul thrived on starvation.

On an afternoon in February she sat taking a dictation from a fat commercial traveler. Today she was merely a hireling letter-writer, tapping away at her machine like a tame little woodpecker. Her heavy brown hair, twisted into a knot at the nape of her neck, was roughened and loose from the stress of the day; a lead pencil had smudged the tip of her nose; the steam-heated air of the balcony had taken the color from her cheeks. One would never have suspected her of the *Mystery of the Solomon Islands*. Gone was the fire from her eyes, gone the vivid expectancy of her parted lips. She typed four letters concerning neckties, addressed them deftly while the drummer waited, and smiled impersonally at his parting sally. Then, when he had gone, she drew a chair to the side of her cage, and, leaning

her head against its metal curlicues, she stared wanly down into the rotunda.

Outside the hotel a station-bus had just whirred up under the porte-cochere. A stream of incoming guests flowed across the tiled floor in the direction of the room clerks. She eyed them with small interest. Four years of watching guests arrive and depart from the Great Southern had given Judy Gray considerable skill in card-indexing their types; but the experience had dulled to a degree her interest in men, as men—women she never looked at twice. Somewhere down the length of the mezzanine balcony a window was open, letting in a draft of damp, cool air. It bore a suggestion of melting snow, a faint, subtle hint of spring on the way. A woman near the telephone booth was wearing a bunch of violets. Judy Gray moved impatiently in her chair and pressed her forehead to the cool bronze metal. The old spring call to be up and out upon the highroad stirred within her

sharply. And across the rotunda Number Nine charged the revolving doors, snatched a traveling bag from an unseen hand, and came staggering back with it in triumph.

Judy's glance fell upon Number Nine and his booty. At once some of the weariness left her eyes; she sat up and looked hungrily at the object Number Nine struggled with. It was a large portmanteau, bearing an unmistakable air of the foreign maker. It was as battered as an old campaigner; every inch of it cried the miles it had wandered—and down in one corner shone a big blue-and-white swastika, the magic label of an Oriental steamship line.

Judy, peering at the swastika, breathed a little "Ah!" of envy. Then a happy look came into her face, for a vision was on the way! She half closed her eyes—the crowded rotunda gave way to a picture of battered steamers from the world's end, unloading bales and bundles wrapped in all the raw colors of the East. She could hear the grinding of

winches and the creaking of cargo blocks. She could smell nutmeg and cinnamon, the pungent odor of matting and rattan, of jute and hemp, all mixed with the racy salt of the sea. She could see the great wharves crawling alive with the figures of Lascar and Malay, Chinaman and Arab, moving lithely among ingots of tin from Penang, bags of copal from the Malabar coast, gambier from Singapore, bales of bamboo from Burma, and coir from the Straits Settlements. Then, as swiftly as a swallow's shadow, the dream passed, and she found herself peering eagerly through the scrollwork of her cage at a man striding across the rotunda in the wake of Number Nine.

He was tall, lank, and yet compactly knitted, with a fine, powerful stride, and strong shoulders that he carried with an almost imperceptible list to the left. He had a face that was the color of coffee, lean and sun-bitten; and there was an indefinably foreign air about his gray tweeds. Judy watched him as he wrote his name at the desk and stood

reading a telegram the clerk handed him. She approved of the way he smoked his cigar—gripped firmly in a corner of his salient, unsmiling mouth. Judy had had plenty of opportunity to study the psychology of the cigar, and she liked a man to smoke as he should stand on his feet—strong and straight.

“It has been a long time since he saw New York,” she said to herself. He was sitting now in one of the huge leather chairs, with one long leg thrown over the other, watching the scene before him rather somberly. He somehow reminded her of a man looking on at a scene that, familiar enough to him in the past, had grown strange and a little alien during a long absence. That he had got out of American ways was evident from his manner of sitting or standing. Among the men that lounged restlessly, nervously chewing their cigars or fidgeting with their papers, he was conspicuous because he knew how to be still. He had the immobility of the Oriental; but his eyes were not at all of the Orient. They were

Yankee eyes, shrewd, deep, and a clear hazel-gray, with a quizzical effect in the crow's-feet at their corners. They counteracted somewhat the hint of hardness in his face and made his unsmiling lips seem less grim.

Judy, looking down at him, put her head one one side, with an air of critical appraisal. Then she gave a little satisfied, whimsical laugh.

"I'll bet," she said, "I'll bet he can fight."

She then went back to her typewriter. Her lips, her eyes, her cheeks, had grown vivid and happy. For the man with the sun-bronzed face and the swastika on his traveling bag had set her on the trail of a wonderful new story. All the rest of the afternoon she lived in a never-never land of her own imagining. Bell-boys passing her cage forbore to speak to her, for she sat in front of her typewriter, tapping away like a mad woodpecker, the joy of creation in her eyes and a green lead pencil stuck skewer-wise in her hair. At five o'clock she came back to earth, hooded her machine for

the night, and stretched her tired fingers. Then she put on a jacket, and a hat with a parakeet's wing stuck in it, pulled on her rubbers and gloves, tucked under her arm the first volume of Burton's *Journey to El Medinah*, and then hesitated in the doorway of the bronze cage.

After an instant she crossed over and looked down into the rotunda. Her eyes searched the busy place for a few minutes before they lighted on the man with the sun-bitten face and the foreign-looking clothes. Then she did something she could not have explained even to herself: She beckoned Number Nine up to the mezzanine balcony and pointed the man out to him.

"Jimmy, I want to know his name, please," she said.

Number Nine hurried away. In a minute he was back beside her, with the information that the gentleman's name was John Savidge.

"John Savidge? Um-m—the name will

do. It's a good, fighting kind of name. Where is he from, Jimmy?"

"Chicago."

Her face fell ludicrously. She turned upon Number Nine a face that was affronted and incredulous.

"Chicago! You must be wrong, Jimmy! Why, it might be Mandalay, or Cape Town, or Delhi—but not Chicago, never!"

She turned away from the puzzled Jimmy and went sadly to the elevator, and, disillusioned, home. It took her the evening to get over the shock of Chicago. For in her own delectable imaginings, in the new story for which he and his bag were responsible, John Savidge had figured all the afternoon as the Man from Bagdad.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN FROM BAGDAD

DURING the next week she wrote him into a fine tale of mutiny and murder in the Yellow Sea. He figured in detail—he was the only man she had ever seen that she had no need to touch up for the purposes of fiction. He not only fitted the part but inspired it. And yet, she could not have told why. There was nothing of the swashbuckler in him; if there was anything conspicuous about him, it was his conspicuous quiet. And for all the facts she possessed concerning Mr. John Savidge, Chicago, he might have been the proprietor of a Wabash Avenue hardware store.

But deep in her heart she knew better. And, characteristically, she had no curiosity concerning facts. For her purposes it was much

safer merely to watch him from the mezzanine balcony. As long as she had no closer acquaintance with the lean, sunburnt traveler, he would remain the Man from Bagdad, full of inspiring possibilities, a perfect figure on which to drape the cloak of adventure. She was therefore rather disconcerted than otherwise when she looked up one afternoon to see him standing in the doorway of her office, with a sheaf of letters in his hand.

Judy had a manner, when she chose to assume it, that was an effective discouragement of anything except the business in hand. Her eyes became cold, her face impassive, and the very poise of her hands over the typewriter keys was an invitation to be businesslike. She now put on this manner like a mask, while underneath it she hugged herself gleefully as she thought of the part Mr. John Savidge was playing with so serene unconsciousness. But she might have spared herself the trouble of assuming any manner whatsoever, for the Man from Bagdad was apparently no more con-

scious of her personally than of the man that took him up in the elevator. He looked over her head as he dictated a letter crisply, took it from her hand when it was finished, and strode out with a preoccupied air.

Judy went contentedly back to the tale of mutiny and murder in the Yellow Sea. The Man from Bagdad walked around the rotunda aimlessly for a few times, and then sat him down in a leather chair, with a rather grim and lonesome expression in his eyes.

The next day he required her services, and the next. Almost every day for a week she wrote letters for him, some of them containing the names of towns that reminded her of a page from the Arabian Nights, and tantalized her imagination with vague pictures, while underneath her professional mask she nursed a sly delight in the situation. They might have gone on thus—he looking over her head while she wove him into ever fresh webs of adventure—for the remainder of his stay at the Great Southern, had he not chanced

upon her one day in one of her great moments, at the very instant, in fact, when a new story in all its gorgeous possibilities unrolled itself before her delighted vision.

It had been an afternoon of few letters, rain outside, and a somnolent quiet along the balcony. She sat huddled in front of her idle machine, both hands clasping a knee, one foot swinging excitedly. She was staring straight ahead of her with eyes that saw a yellow river, queer-rigged craft, a red sunrise, and in front of it a battle. It was the most satisfying battle she had been able to conjure up in many a day, and her blood quickened as she watched it. Pirates from Hongkong harbor crowded as thick as swarming bees about a lone trading sloop, swarmed and hacked with outlandish weapons, and pierced the air with a shrill and dreadful clatter. She saw the shiny, naked body of their leader poised on deck; saw the queer-rigged craft swinging in a tightening circle; saw the lining up of fighting men on the squat deck of the sloop, and the red light

of sunrise on steel soon to be crimson from another source.

“Are you busy, Miss Gray?”

She turned her head with a start. John Savidge, standing in the doorway, caught, as no one else had ever done, the full look of vivid expectancy, the entranced, wide-eyed delight, in her vision that Judy Gray's face always wore when a story leaped into being. For that one instant she was beautiful. But even as Savidge looked at her, the light died out of her face. She rubbed her eyes with a gesture quaintly like a child's on being suddenly awakened, and he saw her turn again into a little pale stenographer, resigned to captivity in the bronze cage, still and self-possessed. She gave a fluttering sigh, glanced at the sheaf of letters in his hand, and ran two sheets of paper under the platen of her machine. But the man continued to lean against the side of the door, looking down at her with his quizzical half-smile. Absent-mindedly he thrust a

brown hand into a vest-pocket—the gesture of the habitual smoker, who, in a puzzled moment, seeks the familiar counsel of a cigar.

“Queer,” he drawled in his level voice, “I never noticed it before.”

“What?” Surprised, she looked around at him.

“That you are beautiful!”

It was exactly the tone he might have used if he had discovered some morning a new and lovely aspect in a familiar landscape. He looked at her gravely and impersonally; but in his eyes there was a spark of whimsical humor.

A look of immense and startled astonishment flashed into her face. There was a brief struggle between her professional manner and the side of her that was girlish and natural, and the girl won. The corners of her mouth quivered into a mischievous smile.

“Well, you’re the very first one to discover it!” she said.

Then she retreated abruptly into her professional shell, and clicked back the carriage of her typewriter severely.

He took a cigar from his pocket and reached for a match with an absent-minded, leisurely gesture. Then he looked at her from under his quizzical brows, and snapped out the flame of the match.

"Smoke if you like." Then she added, with a touch of scorn, "They all do."

"Do they?" he drawled, with a lift of one shoulder. "Well, I never do what *they* do. Will you take this letter, please?"

Mechanically her fingers took down the words he dictated; but the living half of her mind flew off to thoughts of its own. The voice at her elbow dictated:

"I would advise a freight quay similar to the one we built in Hongkong harbor. . . ."

He paused, thinking of the next sentence. He did not know that Hongkong was a word to conjure with, that it sent the mind of the girl at his elbow flashing back to a tightening

circle of queer-rigged craft, a red sunrise, and a royal fight. He was barely conscious that she had turned sharply until he met her eyes, wide and eager, fixed on him.

"Please," she cried breathlessly, "what do Chinese pirates fight with?"

"Good Lord!" He stared at her with a look of the utmost astonishment. "Why do you want to know?"

A vivid tide of color swept over her face. "I—I beg your pardon!" she said, hastily; and prompted him—"a freight quay similar to the one we built in Hongkong harbor—yes?"

He waved away the letter. "What have you to do with Chinese pirates?" he insisted.

"Never mind," she answered. "I—I forgot."

He nodded gravely. "I see."

Settling himself comfortably in his chair, he thrust his hands deep in his pockets, while his gaze wandered off over her head. His voice began its level drawl:

"There's a muddy river running into Hong-kong harbor, and it's alive with 'em. I've seen 'em fight at sunrise, when they left the water streaked with blood. They've got a kind of chattering war cry, and they're out upon you from the reeds like a swarm of yellow-jackets. They fight with almost anything—antiquated guns, cutlasses, bamboo rods tipped with iron—"

The girl's fingers dropped from the keys. She sat listening hungrily, her gray-green eyes staring down the length of the balcony. For ten minutes the impersonal voice drawled on, feeding her hungry mind with pictures of that yellow river and its sinister craft, until every detail of her surroundings had faded away and she stood with him on the deck of a reeking junk and drank deep of carnage.

"Well, well, where were we?" He sat up briskly and looked at her with his cool gaze. She became at once her professional self, with fingers poised over the typewriter keys, and only a faint afterglow in her cheeks. He took

up his dictation. To all outward appearances he had forgotten her existence as he took the last letter from her hand and went on his way with a short "Thanks. Good-afternoon."

But the next day he came down the length of the floor with his deliberate stride and paused in Judy's doorway. Instead of the usual sheaf of letters, he held in his hand a copy of a tattered weekly. Characteristically, he plunged without preliminaries into what he had to say.

"How in thunder," he exclaimed, "did you ever hear of Mekran?"

She threw a dismayed glance at the paper in his hand, and recognized the first page of *Lost in Baluchistan*, by J. Gray. Number Nine had betrayed her.

"I read about it in a book," she stammered.

He nodded grimly and sat down. "I thought so—otherwise you'd never have made your hero and heroine escape inland over the plain of Mekran. They'd have died of thirst within a week after they left the coast! And that

open boat you speak of — do you remember the pictures of spouting whales in the old geographies? Well, you couldn't go out in a boat along the whole shore of Mekran without being surrounded by spouting whales! There are plenty of high-pooped native craft like ancient galleys dodging into its shallow waters, and you'd like them: they carry slave-traders and gun-runners a-plenty, but no one ever goes back of the range of yellow hills. It's the hottest land of all Asia. The sand rolls in waves across a sterile plain. There are no oases. The country is dry, desolate, damned. I know, for I've seen it. Buried in those yellow sands are the ruins of great cities — cities that Cyrus may have pillaged and Alexander burned, as they say he burned Persepolis. . . ."

Judy's fingers instinctively felt for her pencil; her eyes glittered hungrily. "Have you seen them — those cities — the Gulf, and the whales spouting?"

"Yes, and they're dreadfully — frightfully — lonesome!"

She winced. "Please don't. When you've dreamed about places until you can shut your eyes and see them, you don't want to hear they're not what you want them to be, do you?"

He gave a short, dry chuckle. "I don't dream about places—it's my business to see them," he said.

She threw out her arms impatiently towards the noisy rotunda. "And I! I've lived on pavements all my life, or in places like this. I've never seen anything!"

"Except pirates, and battles, and Baluchistan; and you write about them!"

Her reserved, pale mask seemed to crack and be consumed as if by a sudden flaring up of a long suppressed rebellion. She turned upon him fiercely.

"And so would you if it kept you from going mad with the sameness of things! Suppose you lived in a treadmill, and one day you discovered you had only to shut your eyes to float out into another world where there are

color and things happening, glaring light, and men dying—not in a bed between brick walls, but under the sun or the moon! Oh, I suppose there's something queer about me, but I could always see with my eyes shut. It only takes a little thing to start the pictures. A few lines out of a book, or a shadow in the street, and I'm thousands of miles from here, thank the Lord! I know the stuff I write isn't very good, but the boys like it, and some of it sells. But that isn't the reason I write about Baluchistan and Hongkong and the South Seas. I suppose I write about the ends of the world because I'm hungry for—for—I don't know what. Something different—life, maybe!”

Leaning in the doorway, he considered her thoughtfully. “Romance. I suppose all girls dream about romance!”

She looked up scornfully. “I got over girls' dreams a long time ago. The adventures I see when I shut my eyes aren't pink-and-white ones. I don't want the things most girls want.

I couldn't write a love story to save my life. I wish I'd been born a man!"

He looked at her, so very feminine in every detail, slender-fingered, indefinably fragrant, and then he frowned.

"Don't talk nonsense!" he said, curtly.

He could not have explained it, but it hurt him to hear her wishing she had been born a man. He continued to look at her reflectively. He was thinking of the waste of beauty there was in the world. This girl was beautiful when she was happy, and her soul on fire. If she had been born under a kinder star, there would never have been that hard set to her chin, or the restless look in her eyes. Her hair would have been burnished and coiffured, her cheeks pink, her skin exquisite; her slender, ink-stained fingers would have polished rose-leaf nails; her rounded body the pretty clothes appropriate to it. She would be guarded and happy, and as pretty a girl as ever took tea expensively in the drawing-rooms of the Great

Southern. He looked into her face with his keen, speculative gaze, and saw that the artificial light of the mezzanine balcony brought out a violet shadow under her eyes.

“What you need,” he said, gruffly, “are good beefsteaks and fresh air. Do you get them?”

“I’m not starving—for food!” she cried, indignantly. And he went away as abruptly as he had appeared.

That was the beginning of an odd sort of friendship between Judy Gray and the Man from Bagdad. She typed for him many letters and reports of the Eastern Securities Company; and often when the letters were done they left the office and ranged the world together. From Cape Farewell to Van Dieman’s Land; from the Gulf of Pechili to the Black Sea; from the Straits Settlements to Reykjavik. Cape Town, St. Petersburg, Tiflis, Samarkand! The names thrilled her. One afternoon, when he had told her about a hold-

up of caravans in the Khyber Pass, she burst out, despairingly:

“Oh, the stories I could write, if I had seen what you have seen! Why haven’t you written your life?”

Savidge laughed. “Because I’ve lived it! A man doesn’t write about how he got up, worked, and went to bed, does he? I’ve been too busy to juggle with words. I’ll give the stories to you for what they’re worth. There’s one I could tell you—”

He stopped abruptly and looked at her as if something in her eager face had shifted his mind on a new tack. “The best story of ’em all isn’t finished yet. Some day I’ll tell it to you; but you’ll have to promise not to write it until I’ve left the country.”

She flicked some dust carefully from her typewriter. “Are you going away soon?”

Savidge walked over to the edge of the balcony and stood staring down into the busy rotunda. The short day was drawing to a

close, and the lights switched on below were like clustered moons. There was an increase of cheerful bustle as women in furs and pretty hats drifted down a corridor from afternoon tea in the reception rooms, and men hurried to finish their business before the dinner hour. For a long time Savidge stood looking down at the scene. “‘On the other side the world I’m overdue,’” he quoted under his breath. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, as if he threw off a sudden oppression, he turned to Judy.

She was silently pinning on her hat. He watched her tugging on a pair of little rubbers, adjusting her hat with deft fingers. The typewriter stood shrouded for the night. Judy’s coat hung over a chair. With the eclipse of the typewriter and the appearance of Judy’s things, gloves, veil, and rubbers, a different atmosphere seemed to have crept subtly into the bronze cage.

“You’re going home, I suppose?” he said.

“Yes; it’s meat pie night at my boarding-

house, and if I'm late it will be more pie than meat for me!"

She took up her coat with a sigh. He held it for her and then walked towards the door. Suddenly he turned with brisk decision, a rare smile on his lips.

"You're going out to dinner with me, Miss Gray. Now wait! I know what you're going to say: you're not in the habit of taking supper with your customers—as if I didn't know that! But tonight is tonight. It's a queer thing, but I'm lonesome. I never know what it is, as a rule, to want company; but tonight—well, I don't want to eat alone tonight."

She stood looking up at him with wide, doubtful eyes. As he noticed again the faint violet shadows under them, he put out an authoritative hand.

"Come, you look tired. I don't think meat pie is what you need tonight. And I'm sick of eating alone. Do you know, Miss Gray, it has been over four years since I saw a woman's face across the table, if you don't

count a steamer table. And a month from now I'll be where men don't dine with women. You'll come, won't you?"

She thought it over wistfully. And then she looked up with a sudden frankness that was charming. "I should love to come! I'm so tired of a boarding-house! But it will have to be some place not too grand. I'm not dressed for dining out."

Darkness had already fallen when they stepped into the street. Lights were blazing up and down the avenue, and the homeward rush had begun. The girl's eyes were very bright; she was frankly delighted to have escaped for one evening from the boarding-house meat pie. As she tripped along beside him, talking gayly, his own spirits soared suddenly. He felt all at once like a boy with an unexpected holiday.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT GAME

ACROSS the small table with its pink-hooded lights and glistening silver he saw her for the first time as a girl, not an industrious typist, nor a dreamer of absurd adventures, but a woman with shining eyes and a wistful mouth. Details that he had not been aware of in the light of the mezzanine gallery came out under the shaded lamps of their quiet corner: a whimsical turn to her smile; flecks of tawny fire in the gray-green iris of her eyes; the white slenderness of her throat; a cobwebby appearance in her hair, as if someone had blown clouds of smoke through it. She had a square little chin and a way of looking squarely and frankly out of her gray eyes that he had never seen in a girl before. He liked her pleasure in the bright room and her honest enjoyment of the dinner he ordered.

They had a *filet mignon*, a Breton salad, and Nesselrode puddings, because Judy admitted never having tasted these commonplaces to the haunter of restaurants. He pretended to an appetite, but most of the time he watched her for the sheer pleasure it gave him to see her eating away happily, to watch the color deepen in her cheeks and the tired look leave her eyes.

A week before, he would not have believed that he could get any enjoyment out of a tête-à-tête dinner with a girl; but now it seemed the most natural thing in the world to be sitting here, listening to a girl's voice, dropping a word now and then himself, but mostly watching her smile, her little hands, her shining eyes, or listening for her infrequent, rippling laugh. He had never known a woman before that could be sociably silent. Judy's silences were as companionable as her conversation; they gave him a luxurious feeling of rest and sympathy, as if after numerous bleak years he had got home.

The talk flowed without effort. They dis-

covered a common interest in the great wanderers—Sir Richard Burton, Stevenson, Borrow. The last, she admitted, being a little too pottering for her.

“He traveled with a microscope,” she said, “and left his imagination at home!”

“And you would travel like Mercury, or Puck!” he smiled.

The stormy night outside their window emphasized the intimate quiet of their corner. All the selfish dinners he had eaten in solitude trooped before him, and all the lonely dinners to come suddenly oppressed him. Judy had grown quiet. Over the coffee they both fell silent. The girl’s eyelids drooped as if she was tired. He began to wonder about her: Who were her friends? How did she live in the hours outside the office? What pleasures did she have? What was her philosophy of life? Leaning back in his chair, he contemplated the enigma of the girl across the table until she looked up and met his eyes.

“Have you a mother and father?” he asked.

She accepted the question as simply as it was put. "No, I have no one very near to me. My mother died when I was ten, my father two years ago. He had the wanderlust too, poor old dad! Always wandering when he should have been working. And that is all he left me when he died, that and a wonderful collection of maps."

Her face lighted up. She pushed aside her coffee cup. "You should see my maps! I've traveled all over the world on them. When I'm too tired to write, I get out my bottle of red ink and—"

She stopped abruptly, looking sidewise at him, with an embarrassed smile. "Promise you won't laugh."

"I never felt less like laughing in my life," he replied, truthfully.

"Well, the red ink marks the trail I'm going to follow some day when I've saved enough money. It will take a long time, but I'm going! Straight down the Pacific to the

South Seas, across to Burma, then to Mandalay."

She drew a map on the tablecloth with the point of a fork.

Suddenly he put out his hand and laid it over the tracing fingers.

"Don't do it," he said, curtly. "Adventure, the highways of the world, are all very well in stories; but you don't know anything about the hardships and dangers. No, no, it won't do for you. You're better off at home, with your own people."

"I haven't any home that you could call home."

"You might marry," he jerked out.

Judy nodded serenely. "Of course! A grocer. He had a flourishing store, and I believe he's getting rich now. I'd have had a nice little flat, a house, probably, by this time, with a rubber-plant. And each summer we'd take a week at Atlantic City. Ugh! I should have hated it!"

"You'd have been safe!" said Savidge, grimly.

Her voice was scornful. "Oh, if that's all! I didn't think *you* would talk of safety! Why I'm more afraid of the drudgery, the spirit-breaking sameness, of my life than of anything else. It's only the stories and the red-ink route on my maps that keep me from —"

"From what?"

She pushed back her chair. "I'm afraid I've talked a lot of nonsense," she said, wearily. "Shall we go?"

Savidge was writing something on a card. He gave it to her as he stood up. "When you're on that red-ink cruise," he said, with an effort at lightness, "if you're ever in any difficulty, you're to send for me. Send to each of these addresses—one of them will catch me, and I'll come. Remember—no matter where I am, I'll come."

She took the card and read three addresses—in London, in Hongkong, and in Teheran.

"Why," she laughed, wistfully, "you're a citizen of the world, aren't you?"

"I suppose you can call it that." He smiled ironically as he helped her on with her coat. "Sometimes it's mighty lonesome being a citizen of the world," he added.

That night she dreamed of being wrecked on an atoll in the South Pacific; and, as is usual after an exciting dream-experience, she awoke to a mood of fathomless depression. The boarding-house breakfast table was intolerable, the mezzanine floor seemed stifling with its noises and steam heat, the bronze cage had become a prison. All the morning she wrote letters about insurance and shoes, and all the afternoon she plodded on in a like dreary manner. At four o'clock she looked up from her work to see Savidge coming down the balcony towards her.

His long stride was as deliberate as usual, but as he came in at the doorway she had a thrill of intuition concerning him. She knew

that something had happened to change him into a charged wire. He took the chair beside her with an air, alert and gay, that was unusual to him. Judy, glancing from the cablegram in his hand to his face, had an odd sense of expectancy as she poised her fingers over the keys.

"Dear West," he dictated, "I'm sorry not to see you and Mrs. West again, but I haven't time to run down to Lenox. I'm leaving for Teheran immediately. Besides, what should I do at Lenox? I don't play—"

He broke off and looked at Judy. "What do they play at Lenox, Miss Gray?"

"In the summer, tennis and golf, I suppose. And all the year around there are plenty of beautiful women."

He shook his head. "I don't play golf, or croquet, or tiddledywinks. I haven't the ability. I don't shake dice, or play roulette, or make love to beautiful women—I haven't the luck." He leaned back in his chair as if he had forgotten the letter to West. His eyes

turned whimsical. "But there's one game I do play."

Judy looked at him from the corner of her eye. "Poker?"

"Yes, but not with cards. I play my poker with bridges and railroads and Oriental Governments." He glanced with a grim smile at the cablegram in his hand. "It doesn't differ much from the card game: brain and bluff and chance are mixed in about equal proportion. Well, where did we stop?"

She prompted him, and he went on with the letter: "This morning I had a letter from Gholam Reza's secretary. He warns me that Wolkonsky has left Teheran, supposedly for New York. It's an honor to have the biggest man in the Russian Secret Service on my trail, but I shall feel easier when I've finally landed the bids and contracts in Teheran. Fortunately, the Company gave me the last papers yesterday, and I can get away at once. It will be the devil's own game getting our papers through Russian territory and into Teheran.

As you know, Russia has had her spies out for me for the last three years, but I'm certain I've thrown them off the track so far as Mekran is concerned. There's not an Asiatic or European Government but would consider us lunatics to dream of stringing a railroad across Mekran; but in order to take no chances I left behind me the maps and blue-prints I made for the new road. After two attempts to smuggle them across the frontier (that was a lively business that I'll tell you about some time), I decided to cache them in the safest place in all Persia. If anything should happen to me, I want you to know where they are, so that you can get them for the Company. In such case you will find them hidden in a tomb in—"

He stopped abruptly. "Do you spell your name with an a or an e, Miss Gray?"

"With an a," she said, wonderingly, and watched him as he wrote some figures on the back of an envelope. He dictated them to her slowly, showing her how to space them. She

looked up, as she wrote the last figure, with an irrepressible sparkle in her eyes.

“A cipher!”

Savidge nodded. “Yes, and all the secret-service experts in the world couldn’t make head nor tail to it without the key-word, which only you and I know.”

“I!” Her eyes widened. “How do I know it?”

“It’s your own name, the prettiest name I know. It makes a good key-word. Some day I’ll teach you the cipher, if you like.”

“Shall I read these figures again?” Her professional voice was not quite steady.

“It isn’t necessary. They represent the name of a lost city.”

“A lost city! What a setting for a story!” she exclaimed under her breath.

Savidge dropped loosely into a chair in front of her. Resting his arms on the type-written sheet, he looked at her with a long, quiet scrutiny. He seemed to have forgotten once more the letter to West.

"Most of anything in the world, you want a chance to make stories, don't you?" he asked her. She nodded, her face flaming to vivid interest. Savidge considered her for a deliberate moment. Then he said:

"Judy—" the name came from his lips as if he had loved it all his life—"Judy, I'm going to give you a chance at the biggest story you ever dreamed of. I'm going to give you a chance—and I think you'll take it. Listen carefully, now."

He spread out his letters and notes on the table between them, and she bent over her copy-pad. It was their concession to the passers-by in the mezzanine gallery. To all outward appearances, they were hard at work. Savidge's voice sank to its quietest, most level drawl.

"There's a Lost City over in Persia, half buried in the sand. Kings have lived there. They say a king destroyed it finally at the lift of a woman's finger. But now, even its name is forgotten. I saw it once by moonlight, all

that's left of it, a colossal flight of steps sweeping up to a great stone plateau, and on it outlandish columns, black against the stars. The natives shun it for terror of its carved beasts and gods. It's left to the lion and the lizard; but they're keeping guard now over something three nations would pay big money to possess. For there's a game going on in Persia, a game of railroads. It's a little like chess and a good deal like poker. It's played with kings and castles (one is my Lost City); with bridges and steel rails for chips, and a thousand square miles of Asia for a table."

The crow's-feet came out about his eyes. He looked beyond Judy, as if he could visualize the playing of that game.

"Have you ever stopped to think about the poetry of railroads?" he went on. "Especially when it's a case of two lines of steel flung across a country that was old when Cleopatra was young, that has seen fabulous treasure carried century after century by caravan, that lies like an unopened jewel-box in the

paths of two great powers? That's Persia. The country that builds the first great trans-Persian railroad will tap a gold mine and hold the key to the politics of Asia. England and Germany have awakened to that fact, and Russia—well, Russia is on the job like a bear after a bee-tree!"

"But you never read anything about it in the papers!" she cried.

He smiled broadly. "I should say not! The game is being played behind the door. I could count almost on one hand the diplomats and financiers that are really next to it. Over here there are certain great captains that have a vision of some day controlling enough railroad and steamship lines to girdle the globe. Today Persia is their game. They've been working for ten years, underground, so to speak, and it looks now as if there was going to be a showdown. It means millions to them, to say nothing of a big link in the world-chain of railroads. That's why we're trying to raise the Czar out of the game. And I think, I

think, Miss Judy Gray, that we're going to do it!"

He met her eyes with his exultant gaze. She felt oddly excited, as if she had climbed a mountain peak and looked down into a new world. "But you—" she said, in a breathless voice—"what do you have to do with it?"

"I? Oh, I'm playing the game for the honor of the service. It's all in the day's work for me. The captains wanted an engineer, and they sent me. For ten years I've held a roving commission to wander up and down the world's end until I master the railroad possibilities of the Orient. Well, I've come back with my report, and they've said it's good. Now—"

"Well?" she breathed, as he paused.

"Does all this bore you? I suppose you're wondering where the story begins, where you come in?"

"Where I come in?"

He paused as if he were considering the best way to put it.

"You tell me you want more than anything

else to see the world, so that you can write about it. Well, I'm offering you your chance. I'm going back to Persia to see this thing through to the finish. And I'm going to take back with me my wife. How long will it take you to get ready, Miss Gray?"

She looked at him speechlessly. "I—I don't understand!"

"It's very simple. You want something that I can give you; why shouldn't you take it?"

"Oh, you—you mustn't jest! Why, you don't know me. To you I'm—"

He made an impatient gesture. "My dear young woman! leave that to me. I know you very much better than you think. I know you so well I'm not going to leave you here drudging away your youth, when I can give you what you're starving for. Over there in the East you'll have your chance."

He stopped abruptly and bent over her shoulder as if to read from the typewritten page. "Don't move, don't look up, Miss Gray,

until I tell you to. There's a man at the end of the mezzanine floor, facing this way. When he goes down the stairs I want you to look at him and tell me if you've ever seen him before. There, he's going down; now look!"

Judy glanced through the filigree work of the cage. A man in evening clothes was walking slowly down the main stairway. He was tall, broad-shouldered, slender-hipped, with a slightly sallow, olive-tinted skin—a very handsome man, she decided. A trim, black, upturned mustache gave a touch of insolence to his expression. There was a noticeable *sang-froid* in his walk and in the way he carried his shoulders.

"He's never been a guest here before—at least, not in my time," she said.

Savidge was looking after the stranger with a puzzled squint to his eyes. "Now, where have I seen him before? Somewhere, the other side of the world—I have it! Samarkand, the night the caravanserai was raided.

That's the place. I saw his face through powder-smoke . . . he didn't wear evening dress that night!"

"What is he?" she whispered. But Savidge was staring down into the rotunda.

"Yesterday, Samarkand; today, New York; tomorrow — well, if Allah bring us to meet, we meet."

He turned briskly to Judy, a glint of excitement in his eyes. "We'll go on with the letter, please; where were we?"

"At the cipher."

"Thanks. Take this, please: 'I am sending a map and the key-word. I have to thank Mrs. West for her suggestion as to my new rôle. I had about exhausted the part of scholarly archæologist in that section of Persia, and I'm going back as a married tourist. We leave tonight. My wife regrets not having the opportunity to meet Mrs. West' — you do regret it, don't you, Miss Gray?"

She turned towards him a white face and blazing eyes.

“Oh!” was all she said. But the monosyllable was packed to the bursting point with indignation, protest, and bewilderment. Savidge rose quietly, and very quietly put a brown hand over hers.

“Judy, steady now! Don’t you trust me?”

She looked at him, at his grave eyes first, and then at his mouth with its quizzical half-smile. Her gaze searched him through and through, as if it would find his soul and bring it up to the surface. Then she nodded, still looking at him wistfully.

“I do believe in you,” she said.

He fetched a long breath. “Then that’s all right! The rest is simple. We’ll have to be married at once and get away tonight. There’s a boat tomorrow from Montreal to Liverpool. It’s the longest way around, but under the circumstances it will be by far the—”

“Why do you want to marry me?” she interrupted him, passionately. “Me! a nobody, a stenographer with whom you’ve transacted

business. Is it——” her voice trembled——“is it because you’re sorry for me?”

A curious expression came into Savidge’s eyes. He was silent for a moment; then he smiled at her with a sudden lighting up of his face. Taking her small hand, he held it gently and stood looking down at it as it lay in his palm.

“Maybe,” he said. “We can call it that if you like. But maybe it’s because I need you. It wouldn’t be fair if I didn’t tell you both sides. I can give you what you want most, a chance to see the whole wide world and see it right. I’m not what they call rich down on Wall Street; but I guess most everything you’ll want you can have. But sometimes there’ll be hardships and sometimes danger. I’ve seen cholera at Bokhara and smallpox at Samarkand, those romantic places you dream about! And I’ve dodged spies until it’s become second nature. Twice there’s been a price on my head; and there’s not a court in Southern Europe that won’t celebrate when I

cash in! But it's a great game, this skirmishing ahead of the railroad—and the woman that plays it with me will taste life, by gad! Judy, there's just one woman in the world that can play the game with me. I've known you were that woman since the first time we talked together. You'll make a good wife and a good comrade; but, above everything, you'll always play the game."

"How do you know?" she whispered.

"From your eyes. From the way your face lights when you see a story. From the way you look at men. From the things you don't do. From your hands, from your laugh—and from the way you take an order."

"I might betray you."

"You never will."

She leaned forward and looked at him with a touch of something that was akin to awe in her expression.

"What sort of man are you? Do you mean to say you can trust me like that?"

"But aren't you trusting me even more,

little Judy? No, let's be done with that word trust. I know you, and I know myself. I believe I can make you happy and keep you safe. There's nothing more to be said about it, is there?"

She met his eyes squarely, her face reddening. "But there is something more to be said. I don't—I don't love you. I should be taking more than I gave. It isn't fair. You offer me the world and I take it just because I want to live and see things and write my stories. Is that the way a woman should feel when she marries a man?"

He gave the hand he held a little pat and released it.

"I'm not worrying in the least about that, Judy. If you like it better that way we'll be comrades, call it a partnership in adventure. There's many a marriage made on a less honest basis than that. I'm not worrying, because I"—a serene smile flitted across his face—"because I know more about human nature than you do!"

Judy walked over and stood looking down with unseeing eyes at the floor of the rotunda. She had a curious light-headed feeling of excitement, of terror, and of sheer, unbelievable happiness. She had dreamed many dreams; but she had had nothing like this vision of the great highways of the world that suddenly opened out to her. She saw them stretching away before her, through a shimmering haze, straight to the goal of her heart's desire. Never again need she know the blank gray days when vision would not come; never again the fear of losing them altogether, never again the pinch of poverty. With the highways of the world spread at her feet it was as if a door to inexhaustible treasure had opened to her.

"Oh, the stories I could write!" she whispered, and instinctively her fingers felt for the pencil in her hair. Then with a sudden start of dismay she bumped up against the practical reality of things. She turned towards Savidge entreatingly.

"I must think. Tomorrow . . ." she began.

His face turned grim. He drew her towards the edge of the mezzanine balcony and nodded in the direction of a writing-room that opened off the rotunda. The man she had seen sat reading just inside this door, the light from a shaded lamp bringing out the olive-tinted pallor of his face.

"That's Wolkonsky," he said. "I've never seen him in the light before; but I know it's the chief just as I know you're you. You remember what I said about him in the letter to West?"

"The biggest man in the Russian Secret Service," she repeated.

"Exactly. Well, he's the reason why tomorrow won't do. I leave for Montreal tonight. The game begins. Do you want to play it with me?"

For a breathless minute she stood looking at him with wide-open eyes, the pupils black, the irises flecked with fire. Then suddenly she

made a sound in her throat that was half a sob and half a trill of laughter.

"Oh, it's absurd. It's—it's crazy! People don't do things like that."

"Not ordinary people. But you will."

She stood still in the middle of the bronze cage. In her throat a pulse was beating as if it would choke her. She felt a sudden nausea with the stifling, stunting life in which she had fought for breath, in which she would fight for years to come. She put out her hand and touched his arm with her finger tips.

"I'm coming with you!" she whispered.

"Good little soldier!" he said, cheerfully ignoring the white nervousness of her face. "All we have to do now is to be married. Then you can go around to your boarding-house and get what you need. There's a train at eleven-something. Come on, Comrade!"

But she hung back, her face no longer pale, but rosily embarrassed.

"But how—one has to have a—a license, or something, does n't one?"

He looked down at her with the expression she was to see very often in the days to come, humorous, whimsical, with a touch of something she could not then see, a deep and protecting tenderness.

“My dear Judy, one does!” he said gravely. “Do you see that young man lingering down there near the news-stand? That’s the registrar’s clerk. He has the license in his pocket, ready for you to sign. I arranged all that this morning.”

CHAPTER IV

AN OUTPOST OF CIVILIZATION

THROUGH the principal passage of the bazaars of Tiflis, on an afternoon a month later, the stream of bazaar frequenters was swept before the reckless wheels of a Russian troika. It was drawn by three horses abreast and occupied by a bejewelled personage, who regarded the scurrying pedestrians with an indolent condescension. Ahead of the carriage ran a huge black *farash*, brandishing a steel mace as a drum-major wields a baton, urging before him the pushing, crawling crowd and raising his cry of

“Khabadar! Khabadar—make way! make way!”

Before him buyers and sellers, pilgrims and merchants from many lands, money-changers and a rabble of filthy, clamoring beggars gave

way, while donkeys and pack-mules jostled the fleeing crowd. Intoxicated with his brief moment of power, the big bully charged the crowd, laying about him with his mace and roaring exuberantly. Thus he had reached the center of the bazaars and the booth of a silversmith from Byzantium, when over the heads of the throng he caught sight of a man's hat, conspicuously the hat of a European. With a shout of "*Farangi* [foreigner]!" he bounded towards the hat, grinning with delight, clearing his master's path with fresh enthusiasm.

For half an hour Mr. and Mrs. John Savidge had been lingering in front of the silversmith's booth, Judy watching with fascinated eyes a miracle of craftsmanship that flowered under the silversmith's incredible hands—and Savidge watching Judy. At the moment when the zealous footman came in sight of them, Savidge stepped inside the booth to examine a shirt of mail that hung against the brick wall. In the general din of the ba-

zaar Judy had not noticed the increased clamor until the brazen voice of the *farash* smote her ears. She looked up with a start. An Armenian money-changer, who had been haggling at her elbow, whirled and swept her out into the passageway. At her back was a pack-mule and its frantic driver, while in front of her the *farash* bawled:

“*Zud! Zud! Tez! Tez!* [Quick! hurry up!]”

From side to side he swung his mace, grinning evilly as he advanced upon her. She had a glimpse behind him of the three horses abreast, of the crowd shrinking and scrambling away from the wheels of the troika, with barely room to save their toes, and, in front of the silversmith's booth, of Savidge turning sharply to look for her. She tried to slip back to where he stood, but the *farash* suddenly swirled his mace above her head and jostled her roughly against the wall.

He had on his tongue the beginning of a peculiarly Oriental observation on the stand-

ing of unveiled women, when Savidge's arm shot out and his fist landed on the side of the black jaw. With a droll expression of astonishment the lackey went sprawling to the ground. Savidge pushed Judy back into the silversmith's booth just as the troika rumbled down upon them. The bejewelled man in the carriage half rose and his hand sought the gold hilt of a heavy-bladed kinjal. Then his glance took in Savidge and he bowed with grave Oriental courtesy.

"Peace be unto you," he said.

"Peace be with you, Meshadi," returned Savidge with equal gravity. And the troika rolled on.

Judy looked from her husband to the heavy back of the man in the troika. "He knew you," she said. "I could tell that by his eyes."

Savidge nodded. "We've met before—on official business. And if I know the East we'll meet again—on official business. That was the Khadkhuda, the chief magistrate and the biggest scoundrel unchanged in Tiflis."

Judy looked up at his face, which had grown suddenly stern, and a shadow passed over her own. His quick eyes saw it at once. He slipped his hand under her arm and drew her over to the silversmith's bench.

"Don't you bother your head, Judy. See, which of these bracelets do you choose?"

With a long sigh of satisfaction she turned to the old Byzantine craftsman, who had continued placidly turning and twisting his silver filaments into fairy-like designs. And behind her the many-hued tide swept again through the mazes of the bazaar. She had not been two days in Tiflis and already the bazaars had caught her in their spell. She moved as one in a dream through the mysterious half-twilight of the great roofed rabbit-warren, drinking in the sights and sounds around her. It seemed to her the most seductive buying place in the world, these acres of bazaars where buyers and sellers haggled in the four-score dialects of Asia over carpets from Kurdistan, shawls of price from Cashmere, daz-

zling broideries from Shiraz, tiger skins from Mazanderan, turquoises from the mines of Nishapur, and pearls from the Persian Gulf; where merchants chaffered over cotton prints from Moscow and Manchester and silken stuffs from Samarkand; where tourists bartered for wavy swords and daggers from Daghestan, for coats of mail inlaid with precious metals, for coffee-sets in silver filigree and Persian jugs wrought in yellow gold. Along these clamorous passageways camel-drivers, bronzed and bearded, piloted their lumbering desert craft; muleteers in baggy trousers and sheepskin shirts shrieked at their wag-eared charges, lashed them under the belly and pummelled them through the maze of commerce. And over everything was the smell Judy was never to forget, the smell of the scraggly-coated camels, the reek of latakia, the fumes of spices and burning sandal-wood, the scent of musk and bergamot, the stench of narrow enclosed passageways and dung-befouled caravan courts—all mingling

in the unforgettable and indescribable odor of the East.

It was as if she had rubbed the Magic Lamp and accommodating elves had transported her from the bronze cage in the mezzanine balcony straight to the Land of Enchantment. The shadowy arcades were peopled with wavering shapes—calendars and viziers perhaps, or ghouls and genii, for aught she knew; and she would not have been surprised if at any moment the lordly bearded Haroun Al-Rashid himself had stepped out to bid her a royal welcome to the East.

“I’m sure I’ll wake up in Brooklyn,” she said; “and if I do I shall die of disappointment!”

Savidge fended off with his elbow a mangy pack-mule that was unconcernedly crowding Judy to the wall. “I’ve known tourists that talked about the romance of the East at home and then took the next steamer back when they smelled the Orient. You don’t mind the bad smells or the dirt, do you, Judy?”

She looked up at him with laughter in her eyes. "Honestly, I've never been so happy in my life!"

A deep look of contentment came into Savidge's face. But he only said: "Come along with me if you want to see an Oriental delicatessen shop."

In an arched recess at the end of a passageway stood a *dastarkhan* twinkling with tapers. The long table was heaped with Oriental kickshaws—cream-tarts and confections compounded of almonds, pistachios and citrus fruits; earthen pots running over with carrots chopped in honey; rice balls stuccoed with raisins and spices (which the natives dexterously pop into the mouth), shaved ice smothered in syrups; bricks of fragrant tea (the Chai of Central Asia and the Lonka of the Far East), ready to be crumbled into tall glasses and covered with water from the samovars. High up under the vaulted roof of the bazaars the dun-gray shadows were gathering; on every hand the smoky gloom deepened;

and in front of them the tapers made golden points of light in a mysterious blue twilight. The face of the vender of goodies shone like a moon of old ivory as he snuffed a taper and then went into eclipse among the shadows of the booth. Judy's eyes gleamed whimsically as she turned to Savidge.

"Do you believe in Fairyland?" she asked him.

He regarded her gravely. "Sure! I knew a fellow once who had been there."

"And you never told me!"

"Oh, you see, it happened ever so long ago, thousands of years ago, in fact. He was a King of Babylon, or some other outlandish place. For a good many years His Majesty had dreamed of a princess; but as year followed year and he did not find her, he began to think of the quest as hopeless. Then one night, by chance, he wandered into Fairyland."

"Was she really very beautiful?" asked Judy. Oddly enough, her face had fallen.

Savidge nodded. "He thought so that night when she tucked her hand under his arm and they walked down the Main Street of Fairyland. And afterward, as they sat under the fairy lights and he looked across the table into her eyes, he knew that at last the right princess had been found." The shadow of a smile flickered across the serious face. "Oh, yes, they have restaurants in Fairyland—where they serve the most wonderful *filet mignon* and the divinest Nesselrode puddings!"

A swift confusion appeared in Judy's manner. But she said, merely: "I don't think much of that sort of Fairyland where beautiful princesses stuff themselves with beef and pudding!"

Her voice betrayed nothing of the feeling that had made her eyes light up, and Savidge turned away, the boyish expression fading from his face.

"We had better get back to the hotel," he

said. "I expect Hassan will bring around some horses for me to look over."

Tiflis is a city of the blithest piquancy in the matter of contrasts. The street they followed began in the evil-smelling mazes of an Asiatic town and ended in the Hotel de Londres, modern and luxurious, the last of its kind on the edge of a country of weird food and unspeakable caravanserais. From the window of a bedroom, as modern in its appointments as any in a New York hotel, Judy could see the snowy peaks of the Caucasus and the faint curve of a caravan trail that had been in use a thousand years.

She dressed for dinner carefully, lingering over her bath and brushing her hair with a luxurious sense of well-being. It was true that she was happier than ever before in her life. And every line of her face, even the carriage of her shoulders showed it. Her cheeks had taken on a lovely color, her eyes were bright with a light that was not the old fever-

ish excitement. Now that she had time to bestow upon its arrangement, the mop of brown hair made a shining aureole about her head. Best of all, it seemed to Savidge, she had lost the strained and restless look he had noticed so often in her face at the end of a day in the mezzanine balcony.

She opened the door of a wardrobe and with her head critically on one side surveyed some gowns that hung there. They were new. They had been bought in an expensive London establishment, and their presence in Judy's wardrobe indicated a phase of Judy's development that surprised herself. She had always believed herself to be indifferent to clothes; but on a provocative spring morning in London, as they strolled down Bond Street, a feminine instinct, much stronger than any of her wise theories, drew her gaze to a window of sartorial wonders. Savidge, who even then had fallen into the habit of watching her face, wheeled and marched inside. She followed, protesting:

“But I don’t need them! What should I do with chiffon and lacey things on a caravan trip?”

He fingered with the wistful awkwardness a man always shows when he touches feminine finery a little gown of snow white and silver.

“I’d like to see you in it, Judy,” he said. And the filmy frock, with three others and all the appurtenances thereto, found their way to Judy’s trunk before she left London.

She now took from the wardrobe the white-and-silver gown, which she had not yet worn, and put it on with a reverent touch. She had never dreamed of possessing anything so miraculously pretty; she felt quite humble before it. When she had fastened the last hook, she hesitated an instant before she looked at herself in the long mirror.

In the corsage of the white-and-silver frock some clever hand had fastened a great satin rose of a deep dawn pink. It challenged and brought out the faint pink of Judy’s cheeks. Her eyes, wide and delighted, met the eyes of

the new Judy in the mirror, and slowly a blush of sheer astonishment spread over her face.

“Why, I’m—I’m pretty!—almost!”

She was quite naïvely and humbly astonished. She had never thought of herself as being pretty or as possessing any especial attraction for men. Aside from the episode of the flourishing young grocer that had asked her to marry him she had had a very limited education, sentimentally. If she had been less humble she might have spared herself the tiny, unspoken fear that lay always under the surface of her happiness. The thing that puzzled her was Savidge’s motive in marrying her. She had herself suggested the outlines of their relation; but, woman-like, when he scrupulously and cheerfully adhered to the outline, she felt uneasy and afraid of the future. What if he should repent, some day, of the remarkable step he had taken? And, after all, what had moved him to do such a thing? He had never pretended to be in love with her; she had

a feeling that he was too self-contained, stood too strongly on his own feet ever to need her. She had most of the time a feeling that it was all a fantastic dream, from which she would waken some morning, most unwillingly, she admitted.

“If I am ever able to help him, it will be all right,” she thought. “Then there will be some excuse for my being his wife. And in the meantime—I would’nt know you, Judy, in that dress!”

She contemplated the transformed Judy Gray in the long mirror, from the toe of a cloth-of-silver slipper to the satin rose on her breast. And a new, delicious idea flashed into her mind that would never have been capable of such an idea without the aid of the white-and-silver frock.

“If he should come to—to care for me, really, to care—”

She started as Savidge opened the door and came in. Her cheeks were a deeper pink and

her eyes brighter than he had ever seen them.

"How—how do you like this dress?" she asked him, shyly.

He lifted with an awkward finger a fold of the silver embroidered chiffon that fell away from her white shoulder.

"You look fine, Judy," he said, and turned to the window as if to change the subject.

"I've got a pony for you to ride. Thought you could have a few lessons now. It's a long way down to Teheran and a little horseback exercise will be a rest from the post-carriages. That's Hassan at the pony's head, Abdallah ibh Hassan—Smith for short."

She looked out at a tall Arab that stood gazing up at her windows with dignified impassivity as he held the nose of a sleek brown pony. His face was as if carved from oiled and polished mahogany; his great black eyes were unwinking and unfathomable.

"He's one of the few men I trust. I'd put my life in old Smith's hands. In fact it's been in his hands before now." Savidge made a

sign of dismissal and then stood thoughtfully watching the tall Arab as he mounted the pony and rode off. "I want you to remember, Judy, that if anything should happen to me, Hassan will look out for you. You can trust him absolutely—no matter where you are, he'll take you safely home."

Judy's eyes widened. "If anything should happen? What do you mean?"

He shrugged one shoulder in the characteristic gesture. "This is the East, Judy. The game is on, and over here the way of playing it is devious and unexpected." He spoke lightly; but she was beginning to understand the significance of the lines that sloped downward from the corners of his mouth when he was troubled, and accentuated the natural sternness of his face. With a flash of intuition her mind flew back to the man in the troika and the movement of his jewelled hand towards his sword hilt.

"That man in the bazaar this afternoon, the Khadkhuda, is he against us?"

Savidge's face lighted with one of his rare smiles at the "us."

"Dear little Judy! In the game every man is against us till he proves he's for us. But you're not to bother your head."

"No, wait!" She put her hand for an instant on his arm. "Don't tell me I'm not to bother my head! I want to understand, so that I can help if you ever need me. You asked me to play the game with you, but how can I play it with my eyes blindfolded? I don't think I'm a coward. I want to understand, as a man's wife should."

He studied her earnest face intently, as if he turned over in his mind an idea he had entertained before. "That's true, Judy; you can't play the game unless you know it. I wanted you to be happy, just seeing your fill of the world; but I guess you're the kind of woman that is happiest as an active partner. You know I told you, back there in the Great Southern, you'd make a good comrade!"

"Then give me a chance?"

"A chance? Well, who knows? I may have to, my dear!"

They had dinner in a restaurant famous even beyond the Caucasus. Underneath the windows sang the cascaded Kura. Innumerable tapers in silver holders threw a mellow light over the motley company that sat around the tables—swarthy Asian potentates in enormous silken trousers and jewel-studded turbans; merchants from the looms of Samarkand and the pearleries of Borasjin; slender-hipped Cossack officers in uniforms that fitted like skin, with double rows of cartridge cases sewed across their chests; stalwart Georgians in their long white coats; diplomats in evening dress; European dealers in curios and precious stones. And always above the clatter of a half-score of languages sounded the elemental tongue of the river as it dashed over its rocky ledges.

Savidge, his eyes on his wife's sparkling face, felt his spirits rising to the infection of her interest in the kaleidoscopic scene. He

pointed out to her a figure or two with a picturesque record in Oriental politics: a lady famous for her connection with the campaign of Salared-Dowleh; a fighting missionary from beyond the desert of Kara-Kum; a leather-faced American that had made ten millions over night in the oil fields of Baku.

“Sooner or later they all gravitate here—the big and the little ones that live by their wits and their audacity,” he said. “Persia is the honey-pot that attracts them, and this corner of Russia seems to breed adventurers. See that old fellow in evening dress and a turban, the one bullying the waiter? That’s the Shah’s chief—”

He stopped short, arrested by an expression of startled surprise on Judy’s face. She was staring beyond him to the entrance of the cafe. Without a break in the conversation his eyes followed hers. A big Cossack in gray and silver, with a little mustache, had just sauntered in.

"Yes," Savidge's level voice went on; "that's Wolkonsky. I must teach you not to make your eyes as big as millstones when you're surprised, Judy. Have another cream-tart?"

"But, aren't you astonished?"

"No, not even surprised. I had a feeling he'd turn up today or tomorrow. You see, we came the longest way around."

"Yes, but how did he know you'd left New York? Does he know we're going to Te—"

"Ssh! No names! The waiter at the table behind you is one of Wolkonsky's men—the whole frontier is honeycombed with 'em. Down here you must never count on their not understanding English. Wolkonsky himself speaks half a dozen languages and I don't know how many dialects. He's a remarkable chap with a great record in the Secret Service. I've heard he's an aristocrat, in the service for love of the game. They say he's never been known to break his word; and his record as

far as women are concerned is equally clean. It's a satisfaction to pit yourself against a man like that; it gives some class to the fight!"

Judy looked across the table at the live glow in his eyes, and from him to the big Cossack beginning a leisurely dinner at a distant table. She felt a little thrill of satisfaction and a stirring of her blood. It seemed as if she were in the middle of the world and around her circled the color and light from which all her gray life she had manufactured her dreams. Savidge pushed back his coffee-cup.

"Shall we go, Judy? I think tonight, if you like, I'll give you a little lesson in the game."

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST TRICK

UNDER the lights of his wife's room Savidge drew a writing table. Then he lowered the blinds, locked the door, and spread upon the table a map of Persia and a sheet of draughtsman's paper.

Judy leaned her head against the back of the easy chair he had placed for her at the other side of the table and watched him as he began to draw with swift, deft strokes a curious little map. This was a new light on her husband's accomplishments. She had never thought of his strong, brown hands as possessing so delicate a skill. Greatly interested she watched the map grow under his pencil — an irregular parallelogram inclosing a number of blocks and dotted lines. Over some of these he wrote Great Staircase, Hall of One Hun-

dred Columns, Palace of Xerxes, Mound, Cistern. As he worked he talked.

“Do you remember, Judy, my telling you about a lost city down there in Persia?”

She nodded. “Where the lion and the lizard are keeping watch?”

“Exactly. Now study this drawing. It’s a map of Persepolis, a lost city because no one knows its name or history, and every year the sand is sweeping deeper over it. The natives shun it and travelers don’t know about it, so it’s an ideal place for my purpose. When I went down there first to make my investigations into the railroad game in Persia I went as an archæologist, and naturally in the course of time I struck Persepolis. I knew at once if need ever arose of a good hiding place this was the spot. And it did arise, all right! After awhile they got suspicious of me even as an archæologist. For six or seven years I burrowed around down there, from Baku to the Gulf and over into India, until Russia and Germany and England got onto the fact that

I traveled rather too far afield for an archæologist. But in the meantime I'd sized up the trade of Persia, figured on the best way to link up with the Indian lines, got next to the attitude of Oriental diplomacy, and made the most interesting set of survey maps you ever saw. It took me eight years to get them; but it is all there—the best route for a trans-Persian railroad any of them have figured out yet! See!”

He spread out a map of Southern Europe. “From here to here it will catch the trade of the Gulf. It will replace the great caravan routes and cut off five days between London and Bombay. And it will tap a gold mine for the men that build it. It will be a world-famous trunk line some day, and not one of them have figured on that route. I got it all on my maps, down to the last spike. But when I tried to get out of the country and back to the States with the plans, I saw I couldn't do it. Russia wanted those survey maps too badly. Twice a caravanserai I was in was raided—

that was when I saw Wolkonsky first. And when I tried to get out through India I was held up near the frontier and only a lucky fluke saved my maps. Then I doubled back to Persepolis, and I cached those maps in the nicest little safety-deposit vault in all Persia."

He leaned back in his chair with a reminiscent smile. Judy's eager eyes were fixed on his face. "Those maps mean a lot to me," he went on. "Ten years of work, to say nothing of my future. Of course, they're in my head. I could duplicate them roughly; but that isn't the point. No one else must get hold of them. With those plans in their hands Russia or Germany or England would have the advantage of knowing how many trumps we hold. Russia has known for a long time that there is a project on foot for an American line across Persia; but she doesn't know quite where the lightning will strike. It means a good deal to her to know, do you see?"

"But if you are the only one that knows the

location of the plans, they're safe, aren't they?"

"Absolutely. But unfortunately they can't stay there indefinitely. Before the second day of June they've got to be in Teheran. For this is where the game comes in: The Shah has been for a long time secretly receiving bids for the big line, playing off both ends against the middle, as usual. But, six months ago, Russia (with England amiably encouraging her) forced the Persian National Council to set a time limit for bids and for completing the road. Do you see Russia's game? The time limit is all to her advantage, for she's on the spot and she's had years the start of us in her knowledge of conditions. Besides, she's figuring on delays due to accidents. Accidents happen frequently to interloping foreigners over here!"

Judy made a sound of incredulous amazement. "Do you mean to say they wouldn't scruple to — to —"

“My dear Judy, Russia has got the cleverest diplomats in the world! She’s playing this game for tremendous stakes—the capture of India and the ultimate control of the East—and her diplomats are not letting a little matter of ethics stand in their way. They’ve thimble-rigged Turkey, shifted the cut on Germany, and run in a cold deck on England. Do you think they’d hesitate to turn a trump from the bottom to win this trick? No, no. Russia means to build the first trans-Persian line. She’ll use every means in her power to learn the amount of our bid, and then outbid us. She’ll steal our plans if she can and then use them if they suit her. And, above everything, she’ll prevent my getting to Teheran on time, if possible.”

“You must be in Teheran before the second day of June?”

“Yes. There’s just time enough to do it, for I must go first to Persepolis for the maps, that’s three hundred miles out of my way, and then back up to Teheran. That’s why there

must be no considerable delay at this end, do you see?"

She looked up at him as he stood absent-mindedly staring down at the map, and saw the lines deepen in his face. "Then you think there is going to be a delay?"

"I don't think so much as feel it. I couldn't tell you why exactly. I suppose it's a little like the sense an animal has of danger: comes from living in the open most of my life, I guess. When I saw Wolkonsky in the restaurant tonight it wasn't so much a surprise as a confirmation. I can't foresee his next move, but I can be ready to meet any one of the half dozen moves I figure out he'll make. That's why I think you'd better know the exact location of the plans. Then, if they should hold me up here,—"

He dropped into the chair opposite her and studied the map with abstracted eyes. "I believe you could do it," he went on, half to himself, "with Hassan to help you and this map I've drawn to guide you. If there was

need of it, Gholam Rezah and his men would help. From Tabriz it's safe enough by caravan. At Isfahan you'd branch off—"

"Yes," she prompted him, eagerly, as he fell silent. "At Isfahan I'd branch off. How far is it from there to Persepolis?"

With a start he sat up and looked at her. She was leaning forward, her chin in her palms, her eyes intent and very bright. In the little white-and-silver gown, with the pink rose on her breast, she seemed to him all at once disconcertingly feminine, the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"I don't know what I'm thinking about," he said, brusquely, "to drag you into this. I want you to be happy and free to write your stories."

"Stories! Aren't you offering me a chance at a real one? Oh, I don't want to be treated like a doll! I want to be in the game. If you need me I want you to use me. Whatever you tell me to do, I shall do it. If they hold you up here I'll go on. I'm not afraid."

"By Jove! I believe you'd do it." His eyes

glowed as he looked at her. "And get away with it, too!" he added.

She blushed for pleasure. "Then teach me everything! I must know the map of your lost city by heart, and the cipher."

He laughed and folded the map away in his pocket. "You can't begin at midnight, my dear. Tomorrow we'll have another session. Go to bed now, and don't lose sleep over what I've told you, will you?"

"But wait, there is something I don't quite understand. Why should you care if they do hold you up on the frontier? When they find you haven't the survey maps they will let you go, won't they?"

He smiled grimly. "That is exactly the point. Wolkonsky isn't after the survey maps just now. It's because of another little matter he's following me. You see, I'm carrying sealed papers for the Persian Government from the Eastern Securities Company, which is French for the heavy end of Wall Street! They're the bids for the big line. They would

make interesting reading for Russia, and it is these papers Wolkonsky is after. I had figured on getting across the frontier ahead of him; but now, well, something tells me it won't be easy."

"But he wouldn't suspect *me!*" she suggested. "Could n't I carry them, some way?"

He shook his head. "I'm carrying them in a safe place, Judy. You're not to bother yourself about those papers."

"Then I'm not to be a partner in everything?" she said, wistfully.

He took her hand and smiled down at her gravely. "You'll never know what a help it is to have someone to talk things out to. I've been alone so long over here in this shifty country." He fell silent and stood looking at her hand. Although it was small and white, it possessed supple strength. It seemed to him that the hand and her round white arm had a subtle fragrance of their own. A troubled cloud came over his eyes.

"I wonder what right I had to bring you

into this game," he said, as if he thought aloud. "Over there in America I only figured on the freedom and adventure I could give you; but here —"

He broke off short and dropped her hand. For it had come to him with a pang that he had not figured on her growing so precious to him that the very thought of danger for her gripped his heart and weakened his muscles. He turned away abruptly.

"Get to sleep, and in the morning we'll have a riding lesson," he said.

But after he had gone she remained awake for a long time, lying in bed staring at a pale square of light that was reflecting on the ceiling from a lamp in the courtyard below. She was too excited to sleep. Her thoughts seemed to form three strata in her consciousness: on top floated fragments of stories, evanescent and elusive; below these her mind went over and over the things Savidge had told her that evening; and deep down underneath these thoughts something sang in her heart.

During the next few days while they waited in Tiflis until arrangements could be completed for their journey by caravan and post-carriage south through the land of the Lion and the Sun, Judy soaked in innumerable new impressions and reveled in the color and detail of this city on the most picturesque frontier in the world. Each day after the early morning riding-lesson in the public gardens along the Kura, she wandered with Savidge or Hassan through the bazaars or through the ancient part of the city.

The Oriental quarter claimed her and she never tired of elbowing her way through its narrow, stinking streets. About her were strange figures—Armenian money-changers in shiny broadcloth; handsome Georgians, swaggering along in their long white *tcherkas* and caps of snowy lambskin; squat narrow-eyed Tartars, in queer, outspreading pleated skirts and huge mushroom-shaped headgear, their flat faces the color of old brass; sallow, scowling Persians; natives of Daghestan

gaudy with weapons; cringing Jews in fur-edged caps and long gray *kjalats* girdled at the waist with the prescribed rope; women of the Orient far more concerned in keeping their faces covered than their persons; Russian soldiers handsomely uniformed; mud-bespattered Cossacks; and types from all the wild and ragged tribes of the Caucasus.

Now and then a camel, its disdainful head held high, came rocketting down some narrow street, crowding high and low against the walls of the shops. Judy only laughed when Savidge commanded her to keep behind him. She was like a child reckless amidst the excitement of a county fair. She was interested in everything—in the Russian and Armenian shops, in the great ill-built houses with their hanging balconies of painted and carved wood that are neither Russian nor Persian, behind the lattice work of which the painted ladies of the Orient practice their ancient profession.

Of the bazaars she could never get enough. Day after day she revisited them to stand in

front of the diminutive shops, where Persian merchants, squatting on brick ledges or lolling on cushions, pull lazily at their bubbling water-pipes. Among a thousand and one oddments from the four corners of the East she wandered delightedly. She stroked wonderful fabrics, massive with silver and gold, gloated over heaps of diamonds and rubies, fingered cobwebby veils from Bokhara, furs from Astrakhan, water jugs studded with turquoises, and coveted bangles of raw amber and hair-pins of green jade. She laughed at an almost nude baker that slapped big sheets of leathery dough against a hive-shaped oven, for all the world as if he were fighting off a swarm of bees; and lingered fascinated before booths where craftsmen inlaid helmets, shields, and breastplates with silver and gold, and brawny armorers damaskeened gun-barrels and crescent-shaped swords.

Thus the days were crowded; and at night, after dinner, she went over and over the map of the lost city; she learned the cipher Savidge

used, the cipher with her name as its key-word, and more about the map of Persia than most Europeans ever know.

And when, two days later, she sat in the railway station with their luggage piled about her, it came to Judy that here, at last, the game began. They were to go by rail to Akstafa, from which point the caravans start for the interior. Abdallah ibh Hassan had gone on ahead to arrange for horses; and there remained only a short railway journey between them and the threshold of the real East. All about her rose the usual Asiatic clamor, the desperate chaffering at the ticket-window, the interminable conversations of families, who, after the manner of the East, had arrived at dawn to catch an afternoon train.

Across the station Savidge was turning away from the ticket-window. She saw him glance twice at his watch, a thing so unusual with Savidge, who always seemed to catch his trains by some sort of unhurried intuition, that it brought her to attention as sharply as if he had

spoken. For an instant she lost sight of him in the crowd; then his voice sounded at her elbow.

“How’s your nerve, Judy?”

When she looked up at him for an explanation he was leaning against a pillar, a cigar in his fingers, and his eyes fastened on a distant corner of the station as if he meditated on a cobweb in the vaulted roof. “I seem to feel,” he said, serenely, “that we’re about to have an afternoon call from our ubiquitous friend Wolkonsky.”

At the name it seemed to Judy that every nerve in her body became like a fiddle string tuned a shade higher than concert pitch. She stood up beside him, and then she could see what he had seen—the tall Cossack, with his little black moustache and the insolent carriage of his shoulders, coming across the platform; behind him three officials in uniform; and following them, with his white teeth bared in his black face, the huge lackey that had brushed against her the first day in the bazaar.

She nodded, moistening her lips. "What will they do to you?"

"Hold me on a trumped up charge."

"How long?"

"I don't know. If it's too long you must get those survey-maps, you know how we planned it, s-s-sh! Remember, he understands English."

The official party was half way across the station. Savidge lifted his hands, cupped as if to shield the flame of a match, and she saw that he was writing on a piece of paper. Wolkonsky halted in front of them.

"Have I the honor to address Mr. John Savidge?" he asked, politely. Savidge nodded, and the Russian drew a folded official paper from his pocket.

"I am sorry," he said, "but I have an order for your arrest."

Savidge shrugged his shoulders and gazed at the roof. "What is the charge?"

"Assault on the body-servant of his excellency the Magistrate of Tiflis."

"That will do as well as any other." The American smiled ironically and turned to Judy. As he did so a sudden puff of wind blew back his coat and revealed a pistol holster at his right hip.

Wolkonsky pointed at the pistol. "I'm sorry," he said, again; "but for a foreigner to carry arms is strictly against the law of the city."

Savidge unbuckled the belt and handed it over without a word. Then the greatest man in the service did something that caused the men of his command to gape with astonishment. He stood erect and gave his prisoner the military salute.

"It's all in the day's work, Mr. Savidge, as you Americans say. If there is anything I can do for you, personally—"

He glanced for an instant at Judy, and Savidge said: "Thanks. I should like you to see my wife to the train."

For a fraction of a second Wolkonsky stared as if surprised, then he assured them with po-



"You can give me back the gun in Teheran," said Savidge

liteness it would afford him great pleasure to be of assistance to madame.

“Thanks!” said Savidge again, dryly. He looked at the pistol holster in the Russian’s hand. “There’s something else, if you don’t mind—that gun. I think a great deal of it. I’ve toted it night and day for ten years and we’ve been through some tight places together. I’d hate awfully to have it confiscated or lost. Will you keep it for me till—till this matter is settled?”

Wolkonsky smiled good humoredly. “Assuredly! But unfortunately I may not be here when this affair is—settled.” His smile took on a new shade of meaning. “I leave tomorrow morning for Teheran—on official business.”

“I see,” returned Savidge thoughtfully. Then, with an odd smile, he met the Russian’s eyes squarely. “I, too, am going to Teheran—on official business. You can give me back the gun in Teheran—on the first day of June.”

The Russian bowed again with a gleam in his eyes. "I shall be most happy to do you the service. In Teheran, then—on the first day of June, I shall return your gun. My address—"

He offered a card with an urbane and mocking politeness. Savidge accepted it with a politeness equally imperturbable. To Judy, with her heart throbbing in her throat for terror, they were two unreal figures in an unreal setting. She searched Savidge's imperturbable mask for some hint as to the part he intended her to play. As the train came in and the babel around her increased wildly, her knees began to weaken in a sickening fashion. She could have thrown herself upon her husband and begged him to keep her with him. She knew for the first time the fear that can sink the heart amidst alien surroundings and strange tongues.

But she stood erect, her head up, her eyes fixed on Savidge's face, waiting for her cue in the curious little drama. It came when

Savidge turned towards her and she felt in the hand he gave her a folded paper pressed against her palm.

"Good-by, Judy, take care of yourself," he said, in a very good imitation of the tone of a husband bidding his wife good-by until the week-end. The cool voice braced and steadied her instantly. Wolkonsky retreated a step courteously, although Judy knew his eyes were never off them.

"You'll be a good soldier?" Savidge lowered his voice.

"I'll try," she answered, simply. She felt her brain clear and her knees grow steady. Then Wolkonsky offered her his arm; one of his men took charge of her luggage; the other two walked on either side of Savidge; and thus she was escorted to the door of a first-class compartment. When they had put her bundle of rugs and other belongings on the seat of the empty compartment, she turned to look at Savidge, who stood between the two officials, a grim smile on his face. Down the

platform the guards were slamming to the doors of other carriages. At the sound she felt a swift and poignant stab of terror for him, of tenderness, and of regret for something she had left unsaid.

She leaned a little farther out, her eyes enormous and very dark. The train jarred a little and a guard ran toward her door.

“Good-by — good-by, John — dear!” she whispered.

The next instant a very much astonished official escort found itself pushed aside, the guard collided with a flying figure, and John Savidge on the running board of the carriage had caught his wife in his arms and kissed her good-by.

CHAPTER VI

A TRAMP ROYAL

LATE in the afternoon the train crawled into Akstafa, a collection of mud-houses, a great caravansary, a railroad siding, and an abominable odor that is a matter of civic pride on the part of its citizenry. Before the train had come to a standstill Abdallah ibh Hassan stood at the door of Judy's compartment. To Judy the sight of him was like a face from home. She could have wept with relief and gratitude when he made his comforting, efficient bow in the doorway. His keen glance swept the compartment as if in search of his master, and Judy beckoned him in out of the confusion of the platform.

"He is arrested, Hassan," she whispered. "But you and I are to go on to Isfahan. We shall wait there a fortnight. If they detain

him longer, we'll have to go on to that city you know of. There is word for you."

She handed him a fragment of paper torn from the bottom of the note Savidge had scrawled for her as he waited for Wolkonsky to come up to them in the Tiflis station. It contained half a dozen words in Arabic. Hassan's sombre black eyes lightened and glowed as if the reading of those words kindled a sudden flame behind them. Then he thrust the bit of paper inside his burnous, and bowed ceremoniously, touching with his forehead her knees.

"I am in the Mem sahib's service," he said.

Judy felt touched and a little embarrassed by the bending of this tall, deep-eyed Arab before her. "Thank you, Hassan," she said, with a catch in her voice. "You and I will have to help the Sahib now."

She went at once to the station to inquire for a telegram; for in the note he had pressed into her hand Savidge had written:

"Go on to Isfahan by caravan as planned. Will overtake you if possible. Ask for a wire at Akstafa."

The train had disgorged a motley crowd of passengers, all bound for one of the outgoing caravans, soldiers, merchants, traders and their chattering women-folk, and had been met by half of Akstafa. Judy's pulse quickened as there came to her ears the dulled boom of camel-bells and the shrill "Illah!" of donkey drivers. All the world seemed about to go a-journeying. In spite of her difficulties, her spirits soared. At the door of the station, turning to smile at a tiny Arab boy in a fez and little else, she was suddenly arrested where she stood by the sound of a voice.

It came from within the station — a rich and unforgettable voice that spoke American with an unmistakable American twang. Judy's heart leaped to its nasal music.

"Watch closely, benighted child," the bland voice was saying. "See! I place this piece of money in my left hand. Sabe?"

Judy looked in at the door. In the middle of the empty room stood a solidly built man with a head as large and round as a pumpkin.

A shock of sandy hair curled over the collar of his flannel shirt, his coat was off, and his sleeves were rolled above the elbows. Judy's first glance took in the details of the arms, which were long, slender, and delicately moulded, and the hands, soft, white, and supple. The tapering nails of the little finger were fully half an inch long. In front of this remarkable figure the native station-master stood solemnly watching.

"Now! Eeny, meeny, miny, mo! One, two, three, out goes she! I open the fingers of the left hand, and—the ruble is gone. Gone! you mud-headed son of a she-ass! Are you on?"

"I am a Meshadi of Adarbaijan, and an honest man!" protested the station-master. "The ruble was in the hand of the Presence. That is truth. I swear it on the Tail of the Sacred Lion."

The round, clean-shaven face confronting the station-agent wrinkled humorously and the gray eyes twinkled as he stretched forth his

arm and plucked the silver ruble from the Persian's beard.

"I'll do that again," he said, suavely. Slowly and deliberately he placed the coin on the flat palm of his left hand. The station-agent's eyes followed every movement as intently as a cat stalking a field-mouse. Judy also craned her neck, fascinated by the supple hand.

"Watch closely, son of infamy, and do poojah to your gods!" One by one the fingers closed pliantly over the silver piece.

"The ruble is in that hand!" The station-master pointed. "May I be the son of a burnt father if it be not as I have said!"

Judy did not understand this; but she understood with amusement what followed. The American raised his right hand and snapped his fingers thrice. "Hic—haec—hoc!" he intoned. "Abracadabra! Holus-bolus! Gee-whiz! Christopher Columbus!"

One by one the fingers opened, like petals.

The station-agent's eyes boogled out of his head, and Judy gave a little gasp of astonishment. The ruble had vanished.

"Are you on?" asked the suave voice. "Sabe?"

"It is the work of devils," murmured the Persian. "A blight shall fall upon my house and my daughters shall die unwed!"

Judy gave a ripple of irrepressible laughter. At the sound the American whirled. "Well, I'll be hornswoggled!" he cried, staring as if by some wonderful sleight of the gods of magic she had sprung into being on that hard mud floor as a rose-tree grows and unfolds before the eyes at the command of a wizard. Then he took a long breath and mopped his forehead.

"Beg y'r pardon, but you had me going! Sure, thought I'd have to take the count!" The gray eyes beamed and the wide straight mouth was stretched into a grin. As a rule Judy did not like men that laughed, but this good nature was irresistible.

"I'm from New York," she said.

"Well, well, Little Old New York! Who'd a-thought of meeting any one from home in this benighted burg? And how are my old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Herald Square, and all the little Herald Squares?"

Judy laughed. "Do you live here?"

"Me! In this punk town! I should say not! It's on the blink! Worse than Hoboken or Fort Wayne!" He reached into space and a card appeared at his finger tips. "Allow me!" With an extravagant bow he handed the card to Judy. She took it rather gingerly, half expecting it would vanish the moment she touched it. The card was ornate. At one end was the picture of a magician in flowing robes and a conical cap, engaged in the lucrative profession of extracting gold and silver coins from the ambient atmosphere. In large type, with rubricated initial letters, was the inscription: "The Great Jaggard, the World's Master Mage of Magic!"

There was nothing in the appearance of Mr.

Jaggard to justify the pomposity of his business card. Round of face, sleek of body, merry of eye, he looked anything but a man of mystery.

"I don't know what a Mage is," said Judy, "but I'm sure you don't look like one!"

The Great Jaggard laughed; and when he laughed the upper part of his face became pleated with wrinkles, through which his shrewd gray eyes twinkled for all the world like a wise old elephant's.

"Bull-con," he explained, "plain, unvarnished bull-con. But it gets the ginks!" Then in answer to the question marks in Judy's eyes: "I'm Tom Jaggard, from nowhere-in-particular, and bound to God-knows-where." He rubbed his smooth round chin reflectively. "Y'see, I'm what might be called a citizen of the world. Haven't been Home to stay in twenty years. Guess it's in the blood—what they call the wanderlust."

A line of Kipling flashed into Judy's mind.

"I know! You're a tramp royal!"

"Don't just dope out the royal gag," he returned, "but so far as the other part's concerned, I'm the original son of rest. Anything I can do for you—interpreter, guide?"

Judy shook her head smilingly, and crossed the room to inquire of the station-master concerning her telegram. She was told there was nothing for Mrs. John Savidge. Her heart went down like a plummet.

"Are—are you sure?" she faltered. There was something about the station-master's shifty eyes that made her mistrustful. Although he had just answered her in intelligible English, he now poured forth a glib speech in the vernacular. Judy looked despairingly at her fellow-countryman. Jaggard at once interpreted:

"He says your Presence is an illumination to his eyes; but there is no telegram, so help him Mike!"

"I am a Meshadi, and an honest man," cried

the station-agent, looking from one to the other. "May a curse fall upon my house if what I have said be not the truth!"

Judy would have turned away, dejected, but Jaggard said, under his breath: "Wait!"

She watched him screw his face into an expression as ferocious as it is possible for a round, placid face to assume; and her mind as she looked at that absurd face flashed back over seas to the dimly lighted stage of a theater on which a ridiculous figure flitted to and fro to the swinging measures of an outlandish song. "That's what he looks like—the Yama-Yama man!" she thought.

Then, startled, she shrank back against the wall. For in the most amazing mixture of Coney Island American and the high-flown phrases of the vernacular, the Great Jaggard was roaring out a curse upon the house of the station-agent, and upon all that therein was. Incidentally he added that the station-master was a liar and the offspring of liars.

The face of the Persian turned the color of

ashes. "The Excellency is Sihrbaz Kabir [a great magician]! Thrice have I journeyed to Meshed; thrice have I prayed at the shrine of Iman Riza; I am a Shi'ate and an honest—"

Jaggard pointed a potent forefinger at the cringing man. "Hand over that message, my fuzzy friend!"

The black eyes of the Persian glittered nervously. "May my eyes be a forfeit! May a curse fall upon my house. May my wife's breasts wither up and my daughters go unwed to the grave, if I have deceived the Excellency!"

All at once Jaggard seemed to swell and tower over the protesting native. "A curse, then, upon thy house!" he thundered. "I, too, have journeyed to Meshed and to Mecca and to El Medinah, and my magic is greater than thy gods. Thy eyes shall be forfeit, for thou hast lied to me. A curse shall fall upon thee and thine, for thou hast lied to me twice. Thy daughters shall go unwed to the grave, for thou hast lied to me thrice!"

The awful thoroughness of the curse brought the station-agent sprawling at Jaggard's feet. Judy, shocked, was about to protest in the man's behalf, when the Great Jaggard turned his wrinkled face upon her and, solemnly winking one eye, remarked: "Ain't I a wiz?"

"He's lying," he added, calmly, and lifted the man to his feet with no more effort than a child would make in lifting a doll. There was plainly strength in those rounded arms and soft white hands.

"Look at me! Look me straight in the eyes!" He made some passes in front of the scowling face. The native stood as one in a trance; his forehead was beaded with sweat; his breathing was short and jerky; and the pupils of his eyes dilated.

"Behold, oh, foolish one, a magic greater than thy gods can do," cooed Jaggard. He made a stroking motion in front of the blank face. A shiver ran through the body of the native.

"Tell me, Meshadi, the words that came down from the sky!" Jaggard commanded.

"The words . . . the words . . ." The native's flat voice seemed to come from the back of his head.

"'Will forward consignment . . .'" prompted Jaggard.

"'Will forward consignment . . .'" repeated the voice.

"'Of Premier phonographs . . .'"

"'Of Premier phonographs . . .'"

"'To Tabriz.'"

"'To Tabriz,'" droned the voice.

Jaggard snapped his fingers in the man's waxy face. The color tided back; the eyes resumed their natural expression, and the rigid lines of the face relaxed. "Did I not tell thee thou wast a liar?" purred Jaggard. "The words were, 'Will forward consignment of Premier phonographs to Tabriz.' Is it not so? Am I not greater than thy gods, Meshadi?"

"It is the work of devils!" muttered the station-agent. "But it is even as the Excel-

lency says!" He trotted into the room where the telegraph instruments clicked monotonously, and forthwith returned with a telegraph blank. Judy took it and read:

Will forward consignment Premier phonographs
Tabriz. (Signed) JOHN SAVIDGE.

It was a message in the code she and Savidge had agreed upon. There could be no doubt of its authenticity; for interpreted it read: "See Gholam Rezah in Tabriz." And of Gholam Rezah she had heard much.

She turned a bewildered face to Jaggard. "It is my telegram, all right. But how did you get it? And why should the station-agent have kept it back?"

He shook his head.

"Remember you're in the East, where nine times out of ten the things that happen are not understandable by the Westerner. I know nothing of this business, believe me; but I do know the East, and I advise you to remember the words of the wire, but forget that the native ever delivered it. That'll make a friend

of him, and throw off the scent whoever gave him the order to hold up your telegrams. See?"

Judy thought it over. "Perhaps you're right. Tell him it's all right, please."

Jaggard handed the blank to the station-agent, who seized it with hands that trembled with eagerness. "The Sahib is greater than many gods!"

Jaggard waved him away with a gesture of droll complacency. He looked, indeed, not unlike some prosperous god, full-fed with adulation. "And because that is so," he said, "there shall be no curse upon thy house. Thou shalt wax prosperous, thy wife fat, thy daughters shall wed and give birth to sons, and the Memsahib shall forget the words that came down from the sky."

The station-agent salaamed profoundly before Judy, and made as if to prostrate himself at Jaggard's feet. "I shall yet pray for the Excellency at the tomb of the Prophet," he cried.

Outside, upon the station platform, Judy

found herself walking along beside the Great Jaggard as if she had known him for years. He had the irresistible quality of taking things for granted that is said to be the perquisite of royalty.

"How did you do it?" she said to him. "Was it hypnotism, or what?"

He laughed his great, hearty laugh. "I couldn't hypnotize a muley calf. Had him scared stiff! That's all!"

"Yes, but the message—that looked like magic!"

"Magic be blowed! That message came in over the wire just before you arrived. I was in the office, and I used to be a telegraph operator in Marshalltown, Ioway, before I went on the stage!"

CHAPTER VII

A DAUGHTER OF THE VIKINGS

AT the other end of the platform, Hassan was patiently waiting with the luggage. He looked at Judy's escort with a frown of suspicion.

"This is a countryman of mine, Hassan," Judy explained. "He is going with the caravan to Isfahan."

Tom Jaggard took in the dubious welcome of Hassan's expression with a speculative screwing up of his eyes. Then he said something in the vernacular that instantly smoothed out the face of the tall Arab.

"*Allah Yakmah* (God be with you)!" Hassan returned. "The great magician is known to me by word from the South. . . . We go to the caravanserai, Memsahib?"

With Hassan striding ahead and Jaggard

guarding the rear, Judy was escorted through the narrow, twisting streets. This was the season of the year when trade was brisk between the North and the South. Akstafa had all the life and color of a "boom" town, and also all its wickedness, with the difference that here it was entirely and naïvely in the accepted order. Traders and traffic-men that come in from their long journeys with dust-choked throats most naturally rinse them with wine in the Palaces of Delight, where also their pipes are filled with scented tobacco by dancing girls as lithe as the young bamboo, and their ears are delighted with the untranslatable love-songs of the East.

The dusty, gray streets were brightened with splashes of raw color from the dress of Armenian women, or the burnouses, purple, blue, and blood-red, of Arabs. Frequently the dirty drab of some plastered wall would flame with the bright, coin-bedecked cotton dress of a dancing girl as she leaned in a doorway. And matching the violent colors were violent noises

—the shrill cries of the drivers of yawning beasts, the shrieks of the hawkers of henna, the incessant clanging of camel-bells.

Everywhere they turned, Jaggard seemed to be at home. Two old men playing a game of chess in a doorway looked up to exchange greetings with him; a nabob in white burnous and gold-embroidered waistcoat, whose turban denoted a pilgrimage to Mecca accomplished, saluted him as a brother. Dancing girls in a street where it would be unsafe for a European to walk alone gathered around him laughingly, filling the whole place with the noise of their clanking bangles and anklets, and refused to let him go until he had stuck pieces of silver to their foreheads. When he had overtaken her after one of these encounters, Judy looked at him smilingly:

“You seem to be pretty well known!” she remarked.

“My middle name’s Popularitee!” he admitted, unblushingly. “Y’see, I’m not a bit particular where I show my little bag o’ tricks

—in the streets, the bazaars, the dance-houses; and the benighted children think I'm the real thing, the king-pin of esoteric science! Remember that dancing girl back there, the tall, slim one that put her arm around my neck and whispered in my ear? When I was through here last she offered me a toman for a charm to cause the death of a faithless lover!"

"How absurd! You didn't give her one?"

"Sure! And it worked beautifully, so she told me back there. Caught him with a rival one night and stuck the knife herself into his gizzard! But the dear child really believes it was the charm that did it. So, you see, I'm the Big Noise down this way!"

Judy shivered. "It's horrible, and it's ridiculous, too!"

"It's a good graft," he said, simply. "Human nature's the same the world over: I made a mighty good living in New York one winter selling love philters! Surest thing ever! It's easier to pull off over here, though. The

postal authorities ain't so particular, and faithless lovers just naturally don't live long."

Judy gasped, but in spite of herself she smiled. Possibly if her life had been more sheltered and her training had not included six years on the mezzanine floor of a great hotel, she would have been shocked by Tom Jaggard and his philosophy of life. But too many men had come and gone through the doorway of the bronze cage for her to be very far wrong in her reading of a man's character. From the first moment when she met the kindly, twinkling eyes of Jaggard, in the station, she had liked him. His calling appeared to be dubious and not too dignified; he was a charlatan with the jargon of a charlatan, but she had written letters for men of the most prosperous respectability in whom she instinctively felt less confidence. Underneath the tricks, the slang, and the naïve conceit of the man, she was aware of the poise of an artist, of the man that has learned his craft so well that no one in the world can beat him at it.

She had an odd feeling about him that in spite of appearances he was rather a big man. In the very nature of his wanderings he must have rubbed elbows with infamy and shaken hands with vice, but she noticed that the dancing girls, with all their merriment, offered him no familiarities; the faces of the old men that spoke to him lighted admiringly; and even Hassan the Watchful treated him with grave consideration.

“Do you know Persia well?” she asked, in the hope of learning something more about him.

“Oh, so-so! The graft is good in the East; there ain’t many spots this side of Suez I haven’t struck one time or another. You see, I teach the heathen children tricks, advise ’em in matters of love and war, and read their unregenerate futures. I haven’t collected any callouses clipping coupons”—he looked humorously at his white hands, strong and incredibly supple—“but I’ve seen this old world

from Dan to Beersheba, an' d'you know, I like her better every day!"

"For to admire an' for to see,
For to be'old this world so wide;
It never done no good to me,
But I can't drop it if I tried!"

Judy quoted.

Jaggard looked around at her quickly. "The fellow that wrote that knew!" he said.

In the great inner court of the caravanserai, littered with bales of cotton, bundles of carpets, and bags of merchandise, a tumult of preparation for the night was on foot. In the middle of the court a ring of camels knelt mumbling and bubbling around a stack of hay; pack-mules, donkeys, and shag-haired Persian ponies munched grain from greasy blankets, and Shirazee stallions kicked at the caravan dogs prowling everywhere in search of food. In one corner men were cooking supper over dung-fires. The smoky flames struck upward on their bronzed faces, their

beards dyed flaming crimson with henna, and their ragged, oily locks. The master of the caravanserai came to meet them, Orientally extravagant with his epithets of welcome, and Judy was piloted across the seething court, up a narrow stone stairway, and out upon an upper gallery. High up in one of the towers flanking the entrance to the caravanserai was a tiny room, not much more than a niche in the masonry. With a flourish of pride, the na'ib ushered her into this chamber of honor, the *bala-khanah*, only to be occupied by travelers whose way has been paved with silver in advance. There was neither door nor window, bed nor chair; but an urn-shaped hole in the center of the floor contained some smoldering embers.

As usual with the setting of the sun, a cold wind had sprung up and it swooped in at the open archway until the na'ib strung a goat's-hair rope and stretched a blanket across it. Then he bowed low.

"*Khuda hafiz* [God be mindful of you!]" he said. But—"God's curse upon all unbe-

lievers!" he growled in his beard as he groped his way down the stairs.

Hassan lighted a primitive lamp, a wick of hemp in a bowl of castor oil, and spread a thick floor-cloth over the floor. In a corner he arranged Judy's roll of bedding. A qualm of homesickness, loneliness, and something very like fear smote her at these preparations for the night. A babel of strange noises—voices, grunts, and squeals—came up from the courtyard below.

"You will share my supper, won't you?" she said to Jaggard. "It's all so strange. Of course, I'm not at all nervous, but it's a little lonesome, not understanding what any of them are saying, isn't it?"

Jaggard smiled as if he understood. "Sure, I'd like to have supper with you. We'll talk about the Only Town, eh?"

While Hassan cooked supper over a fire of faggots in the stone gallery, they leaned on the railing and watched the scene below. Around three sides of the court were arched recesses

in the wall. Before one of these a red and yellow blanket swung.

"That is my suite de luxe," Jaggard explained. He went on to divert her with a droll exposition of the etiquette of the caravanserai, a hotel in which there are no rooms with bath, no haughty office force, no grasping bell-boys, no dining-rooms or café; where the guests provide their own beds, cook their own meals, and sleep where they choose or can—in the arched recesses, on the stairs, in the cloisters, or the bedunged court itself, according to their mental condition upon returning from an evening in Akstafa's Palaces of Illusion.

In their nostrils was the reek of smoke, the pungent odor of the camels, the scent of hay, of dust, of saddlery.

"If someone should unbottle some of this smell under my nose in Kennebunkport, Maine, and I'd say '*Khuda hafiz!*' and jump out of the way of a camel before I'd think!" Jaggard said, wrinkling up his nose.

"I like it!" declared Judy. "It isn't a nice smell, but I can imagine it haunting you and bringing you back sooner or later. What is that man with the black beard, the one that sits on his heels over there against the wall?"

"Do you mean the cameleer with the yellow girdle?"

"Yes. He's asleep now."

"No, he isn't asleep. No Arab ever sleeps that way. Why did you ask?"

"Why, I don't know . . ." Judy hesitated. "At the station I thought he followed me down the platform. He has sat there so long against that wall. Once I caught him staring up here at us."

"Well, I don't know as I blame him," said Jaggard, with cheerful audacity. "Umm-m! —that chicken of Hassan's smells good!"

To himself he thought: "Now, I wonder what she's doing down here? She's got a little private worry of her own. And she's carrying something she's deathly afraid of losing."

He watched her out of the corners of his shrewd eyes, for he was puzzled by this phenomenon of an American woman, young and good to look upon, traveling the caravan ways alone, with only an Arab servant to look after her. Outwardly he took her for granted in a genially offhand manner that hid a very lively curiosity. He knew something of John Savidge and his mission in Persia, as he knew something of very many hidden currents in the life of the awakening East. Judy had spoken of her husband as detained in Tiflis on business; but Jaggard knew it must be very serious business that made it necessary for Mrs. John Savidge to be traveling alone to Isfahan.

"She's all right," he said to himself, "but sooner or later she's going to need you, Tommy; and when she does you've got to be on the spot. She's from Home, and God knows it's been long and long since you talked with her like."

They ate their supper of chicken served on a mound of curried rice, and Jaggard told her

droll tales of his travels. Presently the noises of the manzil court almost ceased and even the wolfish caravan dogs grew quiet. Judy took one last look down into the court as she said good-night to Jaggard. A dozen fires flickered in the dark; around them lay huddled shapes of men, some already heavy with sleep, some pulling indolently at their water-pipes.

"You know where I bunk," said Jaggard in his offhand fashion. "Send Hassan for me if you need me."

She thanked him and assured him she should be all right with Hassan to look after her. But in spite of her pretended good spirits, she felt decidedly forlorn as she rolled up in her blankets in the *bala-khanah*. She went over and over the events of the day; and especially lived again that too-brief moment in the station at Tiflis, when there had been no time to say the things she had wanted to say. She thought of that last moment when her husband had kissed her. She felt again that kiss, burn-

ing and hungry—the kiss of a self-contained and lonely man, who lets his soul loose for an instant.

“Oh, my dear!” she thought, “where are you now? What will they do to you? I wish, oh, I wish you were here! You’ve been so good to me, and I never let you know how much I really cared for you. And now it’s too late!”

The stone floor became harder and harder; the honorable *bala-khanah* grew colder; and the heart of Judy shivered and was afraid. It became unbearable to lie there shivering and uneasy; and she got up, walked to the doorway, and lifted the curtain. Instantly a muffled figure started up from the stone floor of the gallery outside, and she realized that Hassan was on guard. When she expostulated with him for choosing so uncomfortable a sleeping place, he answered simply:

“It is the order of Savidge Sahib, Mem-sahib!”

She went back to her blankets with a sense

of warmth and security in her heart. "Adventure!" she thought, gayly. "This is what you've always wanted, and *he* may be here tomorrow!"

All at once she was asleep. She slept like a child, until Hassan called her from the doorway. Morning streamed in around the edges of the blanket curtain; cheerful noises came up from the manzil court, and Hassan had achieved the crowning miracle of a basin of hot water. Later he served her a breakfast of hot tea and cold boiled eggs that she ate sitting on a bale of cotton. In the gray dawn everyone was getting ready for departure, roping great bales and packs to the baggage-beasts, cooking, eating, smoking, and making the greatest possible uproar. Yet even in the intervals of arguing vehemently or plying the lash, they were religiously polite to one another.

"In the name of God, brother, throw me a rope!" shouted a camel driver, struggling with a pack.

"In the name of God, brother, here is the rope!" returned the other.

The black-browed caravan guards appealed especially to Judy. With their daggers and long guns, they reminded her of her own whiskerandoed pirates. She half shut her eyes and began to weave them into a story; but in the midst of it she found herself listening to a voice. It came from the cloisters behind her, a woman's voice, speaking in the vernacular. She could not understand the words, but the voice itself had the quality of crystal, clear and cold, a most unoriental characteristic. She closed her eyes for an instant; and as she listened there passed before her inner gaze a vision of gaunt gray mountains, a sullen fjord, and snow lying steely purple in the twilight. Then a word dispelled the vision as a shot scatters a flock of birds. The voice had said "Good-morning!"

Judy turned and looked into a pair of eyes that had in them the glint of blue ice. The woman was tall and very straight, blonde and

big-boned. Her yellow hair was braided into thick ropes and twisted about her head like a coronet. She held in her hand a pith helmet, about which she was twisting a green veil. Over the helmet she looked at Judy and smiled, an impersonal smile like the sudden flicker of pale sunlight across a stretch of wintry water.

"We are the only Europeans with the caravan," she said in chiseled English that had in it only the vaguest hint of a foreign inflection. "We shall be very glad of each other's company before we've gone far. It is the most monotonous traveling in the world."

Judy's sea-green eyes opened wide with astonishment. It seemed a most amazing thing that another woman, speaking her own tongue, should have sprung up in this tumultuous caravanserai court. "Oh, you've been over the route before?" she exclaimed.

"Many times." The voice was coldly matter-of-fact. "I am Miss Arlundsen, Lina Arlundsen. I make the trip every two years,

usually to Isfahan, sometimes as far south as Shiraz. I am the Oriental buyer for Rosenthal, of Paris—you know their shop in the Rue de la Paix, perhaps? I must look after my luggage—I have only just come in by train,” she added, turning away. “Au revoir! We shall doubtless be very well acquainted soon.’

Judy was still staring after her new acquaintance when Jaggard sauntered up. “Good-morning. Who’s your friend?” he asked.

“A daughter of the Vikings, I believe. She’s Miss Lina Arlundsen. Striking, isn’t she?”

“A peach!” he assented, cheerfully. “Great hair, and say! she can sling the vernacular. Oh, good work! See that cameleer step ’round!”

Miss Arlundsen was directing the loading of her baggage-camel. The cameleer in the yellow girdle, with two assistants, was working for her, with a sort of despairing haste, as a cameleer seldom works for anyone. And

away from the big, straight figure of the Oriental buyer for Rosenthal respectfully swerved the courtyard tangle of men and beasts. She stood calmly in the midst of the confusion, one gauntleted hand on her hip, her handsome shoulders well back, while not even a caravan dog dared to sniff at the heavy riding boots under the short cross-saddle skirt of tweed. Her cool blue gaze met the eyes of Jaggard and returned again to the work in hand.

"I wonder," said Jaggard, slowly, "I wonder what's her graft?"

Judy laughed. "Have you ever heard of Rosenthal of the Rue de la Paix, in Paris?"

"Sure! Biggest shop in the world; makes a specialty of curious junk from everywhere. Get you anything from a reindeer skin to a piece of carved teakwood from Java. Anything you want, if you've got the price, Rosenthal will deliver the goods."

"I see! Well, Miss Arlundsen is a buyer for that firm. She makes the journey to Isfa-

han or Shiraz once every two years. I'm glad she's going. I like to meet out-of-the-ordinary people, don't you?"

"Sure!" he agreed, readily, "when they have hair and eyes like Lina there!" Then, under his breath, "But I wonder what's her graft?"

CHAPTER VIII

CARAVANS OF THE DESERT

THE sun, shouldering above the huddled mountains, left a blotch of blood-red upon the stark blue of the snow-peaks, glinted on the arms of the caravan guard, and turned the crimson pennon of the leader into a moving flame. Like a huge caterpillar, the caravan crawled out of the town and across the yellow, ruddy plain: first the swift-footed Bactrian camels, carrying merchants that swayed in their blankets and smoked the morning pipe; then the one-humped baggage beasts of Khorasan, chained in strings of eight and ten, mumbling and grunting under their six-hundred-pound loads; then the pilgrims, riding shaggy Persian ponies, and last the tiny donkeys, swaying under stupendous loads of pots and pans, guns and accoutrements, clanking

against their sides. Here and there a donkey jiggered along, bearing the wives of a merchant. They rode in wooden panniers strapped to the donkey's sides, two and two, their dark eyes looking out over the yashmak, under the shadow of the pannier's wooden hood. Judy pitied them profoundly as she rode by on her pony to her place in the cavalcade; and they in turn looked at her unveiled face with scorn and derision. Often before the journey was done she was to hear them chattering, chattering, in their cramped cages; but never once did she see more of them than a brown, be-ringed hand, or their eyes above the eternal yashmak.

The starting forth in the diamond-clear cold of the morning, with the clamor of attendant beggars, the barking of caravan dogs, the chattering of pilgrims, and the clank of accoutrements, stirred her blood as well as her imagination. As she looked back over the long string of laden beasts, she felt suddenly the amazing contrast between her little, modern

self and this old-world spectacle. They followed an age-worn trail that is older than any man can say. Since the world was young the caravans have made their way over this road that links together cities counting a thousand years as but a fraction in their history. Over it Ghengis Khan rode at the head of his Mongol horde, and Timur the Tartar led his barbarian host. Semiramis made the long journey in royal splendor; and it may be that down this winding course the Amazonian Tomyris rode when she planned her vengeance on Cyrus the King, under the same stars that still watch the caravans filing down from Transcaspia to the seas of spouting whales that lie to the south of the Province of the Sun.

For nearly three weeks they followed the long trail; and the days slipped behind them like the procession of inscrutable figures carved in the everlasting stone of the tombs and palaces that accent the loneliness of the land. To Judy some of the days seemed to

dwarf a century; others might have been as old as the sun-scoured land itself. There was little to disturb the monotony of the journey. As ancient as the trail itself is the routine of a caravan day. First the gay and noisy start; then, with the coming of the heat, the settling down to a drowsy hum of conversation, the complaining grunts of the camels, and the steady pad-padding of their feet. At midday the halt at a *chapar-khanah*, a hasty meal, and the long siesta. Then, when the afternoon grows a little cooler, the setting forth again for the last march of the day, silent under the heat, swinging on through the dusty hours until the walls of the next post-house break the horizon, and a long sigh of relief rises from the weary caravan.

At dawn the desert glittered like diamonds; at noon the land lay warped and wrinkled under a blazing sun; at eventide a cold wind sprang up and the hills, huddled on the horizon like backs of porpoises at sea, took on a hundred hues and colors. Under the light of

sunset the rocks glittered like rubies and opals and amethysts. Day after day it was the same deliberate, patient procession across the yellow plain dotted with clumps of sagebrush and camel's-foot, with long lines of cactus and aloe standing sawtoothed against the lapis-lazuli of the sky. Sometimes the caravan crawled along the bank of a salt lake shimmering like quicksilver; sometimes it skirted a marsh where cranes stalked among the sedges and coots called to one another from the reeds. Again it zigzagged through a rich valley, the slopes of which were dotted with the black goat's-hair tents of nomads. In front of the tents, tawny, naked children romped, while in the valley their elders guarded the camels and asses, the little gray cattle with humps on their shoulders, and the shag-haired ponies.

Now and then they met a caravan on the road, the camels wabbling in single file, each camel fastened with a long cord and a ring in its nose to the saddle of the one ahead. More than once they encountered bands of wander-

ing dervishes—wild-eyed smokers of hemp and bhang—their unkempt locks dyed with henna juice, their garments ragged and travel-stained. One afternoon the sky became suddenly black with crows and carrion-birds. As the kites poised on motionless wings over the caravan, Judy noticed that the natives drew their blankets over their faces. She turned inquiring eyes on Jaggard, who rode beside her.

“A caravan of the dead is coming,” he said.

Judy shivered. “What do you mean?”

“One of the nice little customs of this benighted country! Remember what our fuzzy friend, the station-agent at Akstafa, said about his being a Meshadi? He meant that he had made a pilgrimage to the holy city of Meshed; and when he dies he expects his devoted wife to bundle his bones into a box and ship him by mule or camel train to the sacred city. Probably the corpse caravan ahead of us is on its way to one of the holy cities now.”

The slow-moving line of camels, each with

an oblong box or two strapped to its back, made a somber silhouette against the sky. And overhead the sinister birds were black against the sun.

"It fits in with the land," said Judy. "Some way, down here life and death seem nearer to each other, and the world is so old nothing matters."

"Oho! the fatalism of this blooming land is getting into your bones, is it?" Jaggard smiled. "Cheer up, Mrs. Savidge! Think of the stories you can write when you hit Broadway again."

Stories! She had something to think about, at last. The days were forever gone when the people and events of her own imaginings were more real to her than the men and women in the world around her. To be sure, these days with the caravan were unreal, like scenes from an ancient tapestry; but new horizons seemed opening to her soul's eyes; out of the dreams and visions of the old days something truer and saner was emerging; she was becoming

a woman, a little touched by awe and wonder at the changes in herself, but awake at last to the meaning of life and love.

She had plenty of time to think in the long, monotonous days; and she was inclined to be severe with herself in the light of her new wisdom. She told herself that when she married John Savidge because she wanted to see the world and taste adventure, she had behaved contemptibly, even if she had been honest in making no pretense to any higher motive. She agreed with herself that he would be justified in despising her, under the circumstances. But when she got to this point she could never honestly feel the contrition and shame she believed she should feel, for there came always the remembrance of her husband's kiss as he stood in the door of the train at Tiflis; and from that kiss she knew, as even the most inexperienced woman always knows, that he loved her. The thought sang in her heart. She would not acknowledge to herself that she was falling in love with her own husband; but

she did own that something that had made the days in Tiflis golden, something that had thrown over them the glamour of true romance, was missing now. Many times a day she turned and looked wistfully behind her, over the diminishing trail, for so strong was her belief that not even Wolkonsky could obstruct the way of John Savidge long, that every cloud of dust on the horizon made her heart leap with hope. One afternoon they were overtaken by a company of hard-riding Cossacks. When they had swept by she realized in the sinking of her heart how keenly she had been hoping that among them there would be the one man without whom there seemed something lacking even in the gorgeous pageantry of a desert sunset.

“Well, I’m doing my best!” she consoled herself. “I’m carrying out his orders; I’m helping in the game!” And her hand went to a packet wrapped in silk and strung about her neck with a ribbon underneath her blouse—the map of Persepolis, the Lost City, and

the directions in cipher by which she was to find the survey-maps should Savidge be detained too long to fetch them himself.

Without Tom Jaggard, the long journey would have been maddening in its deliberate progress. The Great Jaggard was a never-failing source of anecdote, of droll observations on the passing show, of light-hearted conversation that sped many an hour that would otherwise have dragged intolerably. He had made himself Judy's special knight-errant; but to everyone alike he talked, from the muleteers to Mohammed Mirzi of Isfahan, who traveled with ten thousand dollars' worth of carpets and four wives; and he boasted that he had even extracted a giggle from behind the curtains of a *kajavah*!

Also he laid imperturbable siege to the fastnesses of Miss Arlundsen's eyes. The Oriental buyer for Rosenthal had taken charge of Judy, of Jaggard, and of Hassan before the journey was twenty-four hours old. Not officiously, but quietly, and, as a matter of course, she

took them under her efficient wing. She had a superb *savoir-faire*, and a genius for spreading comfort around her that transformed even the most cheerless rest-house. It happened that at the end of the first day's journey Judy had to be lifted from her horse. Sun-burnt, powdered with white dust, too stiff to walk, she sank down upon the rugs Hassan spread for her in a sheltered corner, and with the most amazing swiftness fell asleep. When she awakened, Miss Arlundsen had taken deft command of the situation. With a native *batterie de cuisine*, a pot of charcoal and a samovar, she had achieved a dinner that was not far short of a miracle. Hassan was as wax in her hands; her own servants were well-trained genii. Under her cool blue gaze they served a pilau, a roasted partridge, and a compote of apricots. Miss Arlundsen herself made the coffee; and one sip of it reduced Jaggard to a state of awed admiration.

As long as she lived Judy never forgot that first night with the caravan—the kneeling

camels black against the sunset, the bearded men waiting their turn at the windlass of a thousand-year-old well; the glow of smoky dung-fires striking upward on the faces of the low-caste women as they cooked the evening meal; the turquoise and flamingo-tints of the sky, and over her head the first star blazing out. The tired beasts ate with grunts and mumblings of satisfaction, the caravan dogs frisked, drivers shouted and told long-winded yarns, and behind the half-drawn curtains of the *kajava*hs women dropped their veils and bandied jests that would have brought a blush to the cheek of the Porter of Bagdad.

A chapar-khanah is the most comfortless apology for a night's lodging imaginable; but before Miss Arlundsen's ingenuity discomforts melted away. She showed Judy how to transform a niche in a stone wall into a workable boudoir; how to make a dressing-table from saddle-bags and a hand mirror; how best to arrange her sleeping-rugs, and how to save her complexion from the harsh ravages of sun

and wind. She taught her how to wear her pugaree, and how to ride to save herself fatigue. When they came to a caravanserai that was too hot or too dirty or too crowded for a European woman to sleep in, Miss Arlundsen had her men pitch Judy's small tent close to her own, so that she should not be lonely or afraid. In a hundred small ways she made herself invaluable as a fellow-traveler, and yet she never pressed her services upon Judy. She had always her cool air of detachment; she talked little and she was in fact a rather silent person; but sometimes, over their evening meal, an episode from Jaggard's *Odyssey* would set her to talking of the countries she had seen and the cities she had lived in, from St. Petersburg to Singapore. In these rare moments Judy's eyes would be two sea-green wells of admiration, while Tom Jaggard would watch the Oriental representative of Rosenthal with a certain twinkling speculation in his shrewd face. As he put it to himself, he couldn't quite "get her num-

ber!" There was something about Miss Lina Arlundsen he did not quite understand; but nevertheless he regarded her frankly as the most amazingly clever woman he had ever met.

Finally there came a night when the caravan made its last halt, at a serai half a day's journey from Tabriz, and the end of the long journey was in sight. That evening even the camels and the donkeys seemed to realize that the end of the trail was near. There was a joyful hubbub as the drivers unloaded their charges for the night. The excitement that thrills through passengers at sea when land is in sight seemed to take possession of men and beasts alike. Tom Jaggard and even Miss Arlundsen caught the contagion, and Judy's spirits soared at thought of the next day. She felt certain there would be a letter or at least a telegram for her in Tabriz. What in her inmost heart she really wanted was a letter from her husband bidding her wait for him in

Tabriz. She had had enough of adventuring alone; and the weight of the packet she carried increased day by day until it seemed to lie heavy on her heart.

But before she reached the end of that stage of her long journey, Judy was to learn her first lesson in the playing of the game, and was to get her first taste of defeat.

She ate supper that night as usual with Miss Arlundsen and Jaggard in the gallery outside the *bala-khanah*. They talked about the chances of getting into Tabriz by noon of the next day, just as a ship's passengers speculate on the hour of landing. Very soon after the finish of the meal Miss Arlundsen said she was tired and went away along the gallery to her sleeping place at the other side of the serai gate. Jaggard lingered a few minutes in the doorway of the *bala-khanah* while Hassan spread Judy's roll of blankets and rugs; then he, too, said good-night, and turned towards the stairs.

"You'd better get your beauty winks," he called back to Judy. "They'll dig out of here earlier than usual tomorrow."

"I'm going to turn in now," she replied.

Jaggard sat for an hour on the masonry steps leading to the cloisters. The moonlight played fantastic tricks with the kneeling camels, and silvered the muffled sleepers that lay about their fires in the manzil court. A caravan dog in search of food sniffed at his boots; Jaggard hissed at him "Tsst!" and the animal slunk away like a lean shadow. Over near the gate he could hear the guttural undertones of two camel-men in conversation. And presently he saw the tall figure of Miss Arlundsen leisurely moving along the upper gallery.

When she turned the corner she stepped into the shadow of the tower and the velvet blackness swallowed her up. He was thinking that she must have gone into her own room, when just over the gateway to the courtyard the red tip of a cigarette glowed, moved up

and down for a moment, and then shot down to the ground like a falling star. At once a dim shape moved out from the shadow of the gateway below and picked up the still glowing cigarette.

"Thrifty beggar," Jaggard thought—"and extravagant Lina!" He had a jest on the tip of his tongue ready to call up to her, when a sudden hubbub of tongues and stamping of feet broke out beyond the serai gate.

"Ahi! he is loose!" cried a hoarse voice, and Jaggard could hear the rush of a camel as it plunged through the night. He hurried down the steps, sprawling over a man in blankets on the ground, who awoke and swore in his beard: "A curse on all unbelievers!"

A dozen camel-men were talking excitedly at the entrance to the inner courtyard when Jaggard reached the gateway. "What's the row?" he asked.

"Gone!" grunted one of the cameleers.

"The swiftest of the Bactrians!" growled another.

“Ahi!” said a third, shrugging his shoulders, “a weak knee-halter—it is the will of Allah, my brothers. Let us sleep.”

They returned to their blankets, but Jaggard relighted his pipe and stood for a few minutes at the gate. Far away in the darkness he could hear the padding feet of the escaped camel and the shouts and lamentations of the pursuing owner. Then the sounds grew fainter and fainter, until they ceased entirely.

“It’s an all-night chase for that fellow, whoever he is,” he said, yawning and stretching his arms. “Well, it’s none of my funeral!” He made his way back to the cloisters, rolled himself in his blankets, and went to sleep with the facility of a native.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE BALA-KHANA

IN the dim light of the next dawn he was kneeling over a smoky dung-fire, swearing softly at the obstinacy of inanimate things in general, and his kettle in particular, when he felt a light touch on his shoulder. Looking up, he forgot the greasy smoke and the kettle that would not boil, for Judy was standing beside him, her face as white as wood ashes and a tragic expression in her eyes.

“Tommy, my boy, what did I tell you?” he said to himself. “Did n’t I say she’d need you some day?” Then aloud: “What’s the matter, Mrs. Savidge? Seen a ghost?”

His attempted jocularities could not conceal the concern in his voice. She looked at him with a long scrutiny, as if asking herself whether she should take him into her confi-

dence. His blue eyes, usually so droll, were grave as he returned her glance. "What is it, Memsahib?" he said, quietly. "You can trust me. You're from Home, you know!"

"I'm in great trouble," she answered. "I need your help, but I can't tell you."

Jaggard nodded. "I understand. Orders, quite right."

Judy moved nearer and lowered her voice. "He told me to trust no one but Hassan. But, of course, he didn't dream there would be you."

"Your husband knows the East, no one better. He knows that you can't trust anyone, sometimes not even yourself, down here."

"I trust you," said Judy, simply. "You must help me. Hassan is brave and faithful, but I need advice from someone of my own kind. I feel so strange and alone here among these people."

She looked with unhappy eyes, as she spoke, at the familiar morning scene—the bearded men in outlandish costumes, lashing huge bales

to grunting camels, haranguing, gesticulating, reviling one another's birth and ancestry. All the life and color had gone out of the daily drama. Judy began to realize the truth that comes sooner or later to every traveler—that mood is a larger factor than atmosphere in accounting for one's most satisfactory experiences.

“If somebody's wrung your wad—I mean if it's money you need,” said Jaggard, “don't let that worry you. That's one of the advantages of traveling with a real wiz. When we want money, all we have to do is to reach for it—see?” The Great Jaggard reached into the air and a silver coin twinkled at his finger tips. In his heart he knew that something more serious than the loss of money had happened to Judy; but being a man, he could think of no better way to offer his assistance.

She wrung her hands. “I wish it were only money!” Then she added, lowering her voice. “I have lost some papers—his papers! Don't you understand?”

Jaggard nodded his head.

"They were valuable; I can't begin to tell you how valuable they were."

"Of course! Men like John Savidge aren't made for little things. Well, have you any idea where you lost them?"

"Lost them?" Judy's eyes opened wide. "I didn't mean it that way. They — they've been stolen!"

Jaggard puckered up his mouth as if he were going to whistle, but no sound came forth. "That's a horse of another color. Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. There is no way I could have lost them. I had the papers when I undressed for bed last night."

"You've searched the *bala-khanah*?"

"Every inch of it. They're not there."

Jaggard rubbed his finger over his chin, a characteristic gesture when he was thinking hard. "Who was in the balcony last night?"

"Why, there was Hassan, but, of course, you don't suspect him!"

"I don't suspect anyone yet. But we may get some clue by the process of elimination. Who else?"

Judy flushed and looked embarrassed. Jaggard smiled. "I was among those also present," he prompted.

"But it's too absurd, even to think of you in that way!"

"But you must," said Jaggard. "In this game you must suspect everyone until he qualifies for a coat of whitewash. Was there anyone else?"

"No, that's all," she returned. "After you went away, Hassan went down to look after the horses, and I went to bed—no, I didn't! I remember now! There *was* someone else in the *bala-khanah* last night!"

"After Hassan had gone?"

"Yes—Miss Arlundsen."

Jaggard's eyes narrowed; the wrinkles gathered around them and his mouth hardened.

"Surely," Judy cried, "you don't suspect Miss Arlundsen?"

"My dear lady, I'm only trying to get at the facts. What was Miss Arlundsen doing in the *bala-khanah* last night?"

"She wanted to borrow my peroxide. One of her corset steels broke when she was dismounting and made a jagged cut in her left side. She knew I carried peroxide in my medicine case—oh, really, it was a bad cut! I washed it with the peroxide and put on a bandage with adhesive plaster."

A curious look of compounded impishness and pity came into Jaggard's face. "The case is getting interesting. Our old friend Sherlock Holmes would eat it up, eh? 'The Broken Corset-Steel; or, The Mystery of the *Bala-khanah*!' Corking title, what?"

"Please don't jest! It's too serious!" Judy's lips trembled.

"Don't mind me; it's only my way. I'd joke if I were going to be hanged tomorrow. It sort of helps me to think straight. And, by Allah! we've got to think straight if we get back those papers."

The samovar began to steam. Jaggard suggested that she make the tea while he got ready the eggs. "We don't want to look like conspirators," he said.

While she busied herself over the samovar, Judith described the missing packet. The papers had been folded small, wrapped in waterproof silk, and strung around her neck with a ribbon. She had been in the habit of wearing them thus night and day. When Miss Arlundsen came in, she had been ready for bed, and she had slipped on her traveling cloak before she found the peroxide. The papers were, as usual, in the packet, suspended from the ribbon under her nightrobe.

"When you bandaged the wound you had to bend over?" Jaggard asked her.

"Of course," she replied.

"Could she have seen the packet?"

"I'm not sure; but she could see the ribbon around my neck, as she must have done before."

"That would be enough for a lady of her

ability," muttered Jaggard. "Well, what happened after you bandaged the wound?"

"She was telling me about the wonderful bazaars at Tabriz, and I was so interested we stood talking in the doorway for ten minutes or more. Then she said good-night and went down the gallery towards her room. When I got back to the *bala-khanah* the lamp had flickered out. There was no more oil in the dish. I threw off my cloak in the dark and got into my blankets as best I could."

"You had the papers when you went to bed?"

Her face flushed and she looked at him with distressed eyes. "I—I'm not sure. I'm afraid I forgot all about the papers. It was dark, you understand, and I was very sleepy and tired. I remember hearing some shouting in the serai, but I was too sleepy to pay much attention to it. The last thing I remember was Hassan saying '*Khuda hafiz*' to Miss Arlundsen. I didn't know anything more until he called me at daybreak. It seems to

me that the instant I woke up I thought of the packet. It was gone—snipped off the ribbon.”

“Have you any idea how it was taken?”

“Someone must have entered the *bala-khanah* during the night. But, yet, that doesn’t seem possible, with Hassan on guard. What do you think?”

“Personally,” said Jaggard, “I’d rather take a chance of breaking into the Shah’s seraglio than try to sneak by Hassan in the night.”

“On the other hand, it isn’t possible that the papers could have been taken from me while I was awake.” She sat down wearily and held her cold hands out to the blaze of the fire. “My head whirls with thinking about it! I can’t understand it in the least.”

“I can,” said Jaggard, grimly; “and it’s dollars to doughnuts Lina Arlundsen can, too!”

Judy looked up at him with startled eyes. “But that’s absurd! In the first place, she

couldn't have taken the papers without my knowledge; and in the second place, they would do her no good. They're written in cipher, and only three persons in the world know the key."

Jaggard rubbed his chin with a long forefinger. A film came over his eyes, as if he had detached his mind from his surroundings and sent it searching among his memories. In a moment he dropped on one knee and began working over the fire. "I don't want to butt into your private affairs," he said, lowering his voice, "but there is one thing I'd like to know: Was there anything in that packet that would be useful to the Russian Secret Service?"

Judy turned white to the lips. He had only to look at her once to see that he had probed to the heart of her fear. His eyes began to snap and sparkle; but he lifted an egg from the fire as if wholly absorbed in the act. "Now, listen," he went on. "There's a

woman in the Russian service, a wonderfully slick one. I've never seen her, to my knowledge, but I've heard a great deal about her in the East. She's the ablest operator on the staff of—Wolkonsky." He paused after the name, and looked up quickly at Judy. "You've heard of him?"

Judy moistened her pale lips and nodded. "I've heard of him," she said, faintly. "But how do you connect Lina Arlundsen with this woman you speak of, and with Wolkonsky? You're just guessing, aren't you?"

Jaggard sat back on his heels and smiled at her his broad, quizzical, bland smile. "Guessing is my business, dear lady! Now, this woman I speak of is said to be only half Russian—the rest of her is Scandinavian. Do you begin to see how I connect up? There's no use beating about the bush, Mrs. Savidge. I've known of your husband and of his business for the last five years, and I know that the Secret Service is on his track. It's an easy

guess that your papers are on their way to St. Petersburg now, by way of Teheran, most likely."

Judy stared at him with a blanched face. Her eyes were enormous, and her hands wrung themselves together. "Oh, I can't believe it! And even if she took them she couldn't read them; she couldn't read our cipher in a thousand years!"

"If she's the woman I think she is, she'll read it. She's a cipher expert. They say she's never been stuck, and those Nihilists give her a heap of practice."

Judy knit her brows and thought desperately. "But it's absurd to say that even a clever woman could take that packet under my very eyes!"

"Perhaps so," drawled Jaggard. "And I don't suppose anyone could take that watch from your belt without your knowing it!"

Judy's hand flew to the small gunmetal watch at her belt. "Of course not, not if I'm awake!"

Jaggard changed the subject. "If no one can read those papers, why does it matter if they're gone?"

Judy hesitated for a moment. She felt as if the very ground under her feet was uncertain; but she was desperately in need of help, and in appealing to Jaggard she was obeying an intuition that was stronger than reason. "Those papers," she said, at last, "are a key to the location of some valuable plans. They represent something my husband has fought for and lived for, and he trusted them to me! That is what hurts, now that I have lost them. I don't believe the Russian Secret Service can make use of the papers if they fall into their hands, on account of the cipher; but that isn't the point. If anything should happen to my husband, I am to get the plans myself, and without the key I'm not sure—not absolutely sure—I can find them, they are hidden away so safely."

"Oh, Lina!" said Jaggard, with a chuckle of grim delight, "I'm on to your graft now—

I sabe your little game! Have another cup of tea?"

Judy mechanically held out her cup, and Jaggard poured a little on her skirt, apologized for his awkwardness, and with his handkerchief wiped away the few drops of tea.

"Never mind the tea. What would you advise me to do?" Judy asked him. "I must get those papers back, whatever happens. Have you any suggestions?"

He looked across the courtyard thoughtfully, and up at the gallery in front of the bala-khanah. "Here comes Hassan. Now, this is my advice: Finish your breakfast as if nothing had happened, and I'll go up and have a little casual conversation with the daughter of the Vikings."

Judy rose to follow him. "Then I'll go with you," she said.

Jaggard put out a detaining arm. "I think you'd better let me see her alone. If I'm to help you, I've got to play the game my own way—see? You wait for me here. The cara-

van will start in half an hour, but I think before then we'll have a clue."

He started across the courtyard, but half-way to the stairs he turned suddenly and came back to her. His face wore its broadest smile.

"I forgot to give you this." He held out his hand. Lying in its palm was Judy's little watch.

"How—how did you do it?" she gasped.

"Sleight-of-hand, when I spilled the tea."

He grinned down at her nonplused face. "It's my trade," he explained. "And if Lina Arlundsen's the woman I think she is, she can give me cards and spades and beat me out with both hands tied!"

CHAPTER X

GREEK MEETS GREEK

AS Jaggard strode across the serai the first rays of the rising sun splashed red on the manzil walls. A tom-tom sounded in the tower and a shrill voice cried:

"Allah il Allah, there is no God but God!"

The faithful in the courtyard prostrated themselves in the dust, their faces toward Mecca; and from their swarthy throats came the thundering response:

"There is no God but God!"

Jaggard made his way up the dark flight of stairs and along the corridor towards the bala-khanah. And as he walked he reconstructed the theft of Judy's papers. No one knew better than he what a simple matter it must have been for a person with trained fingers. A half turn of the body, a slight jostle of the victim

at the critical moment, and the trick was done. The only tool needed was a tiny pair of scissors concealed in the hand. To snip the ribbon and palm away the packet offered no insurmountable difficulties to one possessed of the requisite nerve and dexterity.

He found Miss Arlundsen in the gallery above the serai gate. She was sitting cross-legged on the floor like a native, her back against the parapet, placidly engaged in a game of solitaire.

"Good-morning, M'sieu Jaggard," she said, pleasantly returning his greeting as he paused in front of her. She rolled the "r" and accented the last syllable as a Frenchwoman would have done. "One has to pass the time in some way—is it not so?" She pointed to the cards on the floor.

Jaggard pulled out his pipe, filled the bowl with yellow Persian tobacco, tamping it down with a slim forefinger. Then with equal deliberation he lit up and exhaled a cloud of blue smoke into the frosty morning air.

"Don't you find it rather tame?" he asked at length, with a dry chuckle.

"What do you mean?" Her voice was mildly indifferent. Jaggard looked at her admiringly: at the trig, spick figure in riding-skirt and jacket of brown tweed, at the helmet resting on the coiled ropes of yellow hair, at the creamy freshness of her cheeks and the perfect oval of her chin. The eyes she lifted inquiringly to Jaggard's were as coldly blue as a wintry sky. "I'd give a good deal if I could hear what's going on under that helmet," he said to himself. Then aloud: "I should think you'd find poker more in your line?"

"I do not understand you," replied Miss Arlundsén.

"No, of course not. I'll elucidate. Listen!" pointing to the cards. "That's a dinky game—get that?—a kindergarten recreation compared with what you usually play. Sabe?"

"A kindergarten game?" she spoke slowly in her beautiful, precise English. "Is it what

you Americans call a—joke?” She turned a card. “You are so droll, you Americans!”

“We’re a nation of cut-ups, Lina!” He grinned audaciously as he used her name. Her eyelids fluttered, but she did not look up. “We’re the real goods when it comes to doping out the dido stuff. But this is no joke. I’m in dead earnest. I’ve white-chipped my way into this game, and I intend to draw cards—sabe?”

Miss Arlundsen did not seem to hear. Chin in hand, she studied the cards. “Two kings in the top row,” she murmured. “M’sieu Jaggard, I’ll wager you a hundred kran I make the game!”

Jaggard sucked thoughtfully at his pipe, and the wrinkles gathered around his eyes. Here was a woman after his own heart—shrewd, cool, adroit; and it was with an unaccustomed thrill he realized that he should have need of all his resources if he was to play the game with her. It was one of the great moments in the life of the Great Jag-

gard. But his placid face gave no hint of the pleasurable emotions that glowed in his soul.

"The odds are against you," he said aloud. What he said to himself was: "Careful, Tommy, or here's where the lady gets a mortgage on your goat."

Miss Arlundsen shrugged her shoulders. "Are you afraid to take the bank?" There was a note of mockery in her voice that flicked him like the lash of a skillfully handled whip. Under the purring softness of her voice—a note quite different from the cold incisiveness of her usual tone—it seemed to him that he detected a challenge to play a bigger game than the cards stood for. Every drop of gambling blood in his body stirred. There never had been a game that Tom Jaggard would not play, never a hazard so preposterous that he would not take the small end of the bet.

"Make it something worth while," he returned, genially; "say two hundred kran, and I'll take the bank."

"As you please!" She turned down a card.

"Ah! another king, and a space in the top row. They seem to be—how do you say it?—coming my way? Is it not so?"

"They do for a fact!" he said, slowly. "Everything's coming your way. You sure are a wonder! I'll take off my hat to you any day in the week!"

She lifted her eyebrows. "What for? I don't understand."

"That's French for I'm stuck on your work. There's nothing coarse about it, Lina! It's megalorious, all to the good, and eighteen karats fine. I've been doing the hanky-panky stunt for twenty years, but you've got me trimmed twenty ways to Sunday. The undersigned is a piker compared with you!"

"Again I don't understand."

"You don't sabe, eh? Well, then, my dear, I'll spiel it to you in words of one syllable. I'm a committee of one appointed to request you to please keep off the grass. The game's up, Lina—hand over those papers!"

Miss Arlundsen did not answer. She ap-

peared to be engrossed in the cards on the floor.

"Well?" There was a hard note of impatience in his voice.

"Papers?" she asked, wrinkling her forehead as if in perplexity. "What papers?"

"The papers you took from Judith Savidge in the *bala-khanah* last night. I want 'em—understand? I want 'em before we leave the caravanserai." There was nothing genial about the Great Jaggard now.

Miss Arlundsen looked at him, and her gaze was one of utter incomprehensibility. "Judith," she murmured; "Judith is a very pretty name; one does not hear it often."

"I want those papers, now!"

"You are so amusing, M'sieu Jaggard!" she retorted, smilingly.

"I'll be a scream before I'm through," he said, grimly. He took a step forward and stood squarely in front of her. "What's the use of palavering? We're only wasting time. You understand, all right, so pony up—pro-

duce!" Then his manner changed and the wrinkles of humor gathered under his eyes. "Come," he said, "be a good girl, and we'll play solitaire, casino—any old game you like!"

The woman turned up a card indifferently.

"Ah! the fourth king, M'sieu Jaggard. Another hundred kran that I make the game?"

Looking down at her, the genial patience of Jaggard seemed suddenly to give way. He lowered his sandy head. His face became threatening and ugly. "Damn the game!" he snapped. "I want those papers! I'm no tenderfoot; you can't play me for a sucker! You've got 'em, and I'll have them if I have to strip every rag off your back!"

Lina Arlundsen leaped to her feet. "You swine!" she snarled. "You even touch me and I'll kill you!"

The veneer of her cool poise seemed to crack; and the soul of her, vindictive, enraged, and quite fearless, blazed through. There flowered a vivid crimson spot on each cheek.

As they stood confronting each other there floated up to them the droning intonation of the faithful:

“There is no God but God, and Mahomet is the slave of God!”

The man was the first to recover himself. “That’s all right, my dear!” he said, mildly. “All you have to do is to hand over those papers. I’m up to your little game, you see.”

The vivid spot faded slowly from her cheeks, and an insolent gleam came into her eyes. “What is *your* little game, M’sieu?” she inquired.

Jaggard resumed his habitual attitude, thumbs in pockets, head thrust forward, legs wide apart. “Don’t make such rude insinuations, my dear,” he said, pleasantly. “They hurt my feelings and get on my nerves. Come, let’s chuck this rapid-fire act. You know my game’s on the square. I’m not connected with the Russian Secret Service! Don’t suppose you ever heard of the Service—eh? Or of Serge Wolkonsky, either?”

A subtle and almost imperceptible hardening of her face was the only sign she showed that this random shot had gone home. There was anger and defiance in her eyes, but no fear. It flashed into Jaggard's mind that even in her outburst of anger there had not been a hint of the fear a person would show that carried something another was threatening to take by force. There had not been a single betraying gesture or glance. The fierce blaze of anger she showed had in it only the element of personal repulsion.

He was forced to a single conclusion: she showed no fear because she had nothing to be afraid of—the papers were not in her possession. If it had not been for that subtle change in her expression when he mentioned the Service and Wolkonsky, he would begin to feel uncertain of his ground. As it was, he merely felt puzzled.

“Talk is cheap, M'sieu Jaggard,” she sneered. From the pocket of her jacket she took a tiny silver cigarette case, lighted a cig-

arette, and tossed the match down into the courtyard.

The glowing tip of her cigarette reminded him of something; for an instant his mind went groping for the elusive suggestion. Then suddenly, as if the spark from the cigarette had lighted up a series of pictures before his mind's eye, he saw again a red spark shooting downward like a falling star, saw a dim figure creep out from the shadow of the serai gate, pick up the glowing butt of a cigarette, and melt again into the shadow. And he heard again the thud of a camel running away into the night.

"Oh, good work!" he cried aloud. "Good work, my dear! I don't suppose you know anything about the camel that broke its halter and ran away last night?"

It was a bit of sheer guessing, but her face turned white, the creamy white of ivory, although her eyes did not waver. "How should I know?" she retorted, disdainfully. "What have I to do with camels?"

“Nothing, of course! How should you know that the swiftest of the Bactrians was stampeded at the serai gate last night? How should you know that its driver waited in the shadow of the tower for a signal—the dropping of a lighted cigarette? How should you know that a woman, leaning over the parapet above, gave the signal and dropped a packet at his feet? And I don’t suppose you have a suspicion that the packet is now in a saddlebag of that camel, on the way to—Wolkonsky—eh?”

She stared at him with a malicious gleam in her blue eyes. “You are so clever, M’sieu,” she said, “it is a pity you are going to lose this game.”

She sat down again and turned up a card or two, with her tapering, skillful fingers. Jaggard looked down at her with the light of honest admiration in his eyes. “Say, Lina!” he remarked, candidly, “you and I could clean up all the fall guys between Port Said and ’Frisco! What a team we’d make! We’d

trim 'em all. The captains of high finance would be as easy as the rubes."

Miss Arlundsen pointed to the four packets of cards face upward on the floor. On the top of each packet was a king.

"I win, M'sieu Jaggard," she said, mockingly.

"Win? Of course, you win!" he drawled. "You win everything in sight, hands down." He tossed the money into her lap. "But one of these days, my dear, there may be another deal, and then it'll be my turn to shuffle the cards!"

As he walked back across the manzil court there was a stirring outside the serai gate that betokened the starting of the caravan. Jaggard hastily, but none the less picturesquely, sketched for Judy his interview with Miss Arlundsen.

"Remember that old buccaneer with the black beard and yellow girdle that stuck to you like a poor relation that night at Akstafa?" he asked her. "Well, I figure out



"I win, M'sieu Jaggard"

he's the one that did the job. Probably was ordered to shadow you till our friend Lina arrived on the scene. You remember she came in from Tiflis on the next train after you?"

Judy's face became haggard. "I wish I could be sure," she sighed.

"It's the surest thing you know! By this time that yellow-girdled Arab is fifty miles away and skyhooting for Teheran, or wherever your friend Wolkonsky holds forth. I'll tell you what—we'll hang around the gate when the caravan starts, and if his whiskers isn't in the procession, it's a cinch he's got the goods!"

For an instant Judy's composure gave way and she dropped her face in her hands. Jaggard patted her shoulder awkwardly. "The game's never lost till the last card's played, my dear!" he said. "Look here—I'm for you, you know, and that's something, if I do say it! We'll beat out little Lina yet. What are your plans, if you don't mind telling me, after you get to Tabriz?"

Judy looked up with a feverish color in her

cheeks. "There's a man I'm to see in Tabriz. He may possibly have some message for me from my husband. If there's no word for me, I really don't know what I shall do."

"Is this man someone you can depend on?"

"His name is Gholam Rezah. Do you know him?"

"Know of him," Jaggard said. "He's a pretty big man in Persia—got all kinds of dough. He used to publish a paper in Teheran until he joined the revolutionary party. Then the paper was suppressed and Gholam was banished from the capital. He's at the head of a big secret society that's working to establish a liberal government and save the country from the clutches of Russia—sort of Young Persian party, you see. He's done all he can to keep Russia from getting railroad concessions, and I reckon he and your husband know each other pretty well."

Judy nodded absently. Then she stood up and her face flushed. Miss Arlundsen was coming towards them across the courtyard

with her free, swinging stride. Her expression was, as usual, coldly serene.

"Don't let her think she's got you worried," Jaggard admonished her in an undertone. "Just trail along till it comes time to draw cards, then stand pat."

Miss Arlundsen's good-morning was as cool and crisp as usual. She was as unaffectedly cordial as she had been at any time during the journey. She smiled and nodded to Jaggard and then turned to Judy.

"M'sieu Jaggard has told me of your misfortune," she said. "I'm very sorry."

"Really, it's nothing of great importance," Judy answered, coldly. "The papers I lost will be of no value whatsoever to the finder."

Her chin was up and her eyes unflinchingly met Miss Arlundsen's scrutiny. "She's playing the game!" Jaggard thought.

"No? I am glad," said Miss Arlundsen. "I must have misunderstood M'sieu Jaggard. One cannot always tell what M'sieu means from his language—is it not so? I, too, have

lost many things on these journeys—money, jewels, valuables. They are all thieves.” She inclined her head toward the camel-men bustling about in their varied preparations for departure.

“Especially the black-bearded pirates with yellow girdles,” Jaggard staccatoed.

Miss Arlundsen smiled, with ever so slight a lift of her fine eyebrows. “I dare say one is as bad as another,” she returned, indifferently. Then she turned away and walked deliberately across the courtyard. Jaggard looked after her strong, graceful figure and whistled reflectively between his teeth.

“And yet they won’t let ’em vote,” he ruminated, screwing up his face until it resembled a gargoyle.

Judy stood with him in the shadow of the tower, while the grumbling camels shambled through the serai gate. The black-bearded cameleer with the yellow girdle, who piloted the fleet-footed Bactrian dromedary, was not in the cavalcade, and Judy was compelled to

admit that circumstantial evidence favored Jaggard's theory. It was with a heavy heart she mounted her shaggy pony and followed in the wake of the caravan on the last stage of the journey to Tabriz.

It was the beginning of April, and almost in a night a magical change had been wrought over the land. All the way down from Akstafa the caravan had crawled across desolate plains, pinched and shrewdish and old. But this morning as she rode out of the serai gate Judy could scarcely believe her eyes. In the night rain had fallen. Where the day before had been stony waste and saffron-colored plain, today was the green plenitude of spring, gently waving grass, and nodding wild flowers. The air was heavy with the odor of growing herbage, and more than once the caravan sheered from the beaten path to graze across the plain.

But April is April the world over—coy, uncertain, trembling between laughter and tears. The morning was insincerely bright,

flashing and glittering with those siren smiles that lure to ambuscades of rain. The caravan had not covered half of the three remaining farsakhs of the journey before the rain came down, at first in iridescent showers, the sun smiling through the scudding drops, then in a cold gray mizzle. The sky sagged low, and Judy strained her eyes in vain for a glimpse of the domes and minarets of world-old Tabriz.

The caravan sloshed through the yellow mud, the men with blankets shrouding their faces, the women with the curtains of the *kajavahs* drawn taut against the storm. Hour after hour they plodded along sluggishly. Then about noon a tremor of excitement rippled through the cavalcade. There were guttural shouts of "*Ahe! Ahi!*" and, breasting a low hill no bigger than an ocean roller, wall-ringed Tabriz stretched before them with its monotonous expanse of flat-roofed, single-storied houses, broken up by the domed arches of the bazaars, the minarets of the mosques,

and the shouldering wall of the ancient citadel. As the caravan entered the city the sun smote through the leaden sky and slanted on the Masjid-i-Kabud, the famous blue Mosque of Mohammedan history. It flushed the dome and arches encrusted with blue tile bordered with a faïence of yellow, white, and black, until, seen through the mist, the crumbling walls appeared to take on a hundred unreal shapes.

Judy held her breath. Though she was soaked to the skin and bedraggled generally, the momentary glimpse of the witchery wrought by sun and mist was worth all the discomforts of the journey. Then the sun disappeared, the rain fell gray and sheer, and the caravan wound its way through the narrow, labyrinthine streets to the bazaars.

Rain at home is restful, but away from home it is the dreariest thing imaginable. Judy, ensconced in the *bala-khanah* of the huge caravanserai attached to the bazaars, was miserable in mind and body, and disposed to

rebel against the ancient law that imposes upon the stranger within the gates an obligation to conform to the customs and usages of the citizenry. As soon as she had donned dry clothing she would have set out at once for the house of the Aga Gholam Rezah, but Jaggard wagged his head against the plan.

"You're not in Gallipolis or Keokuk," he explained. "Over here people don't gossip over the backyard fence or run in any old time for a visit. Rezah's one of the leading citizens. According to local etiquette, you've got to give him at least two hours' notice."

So Hassan was despatched to the house of Rezah, and returned with the information that Savidge Memsahib would be received at two hours before sunset.

Depending on Hassan's sense of Oriental chronology, they set out from the caravanserai, for Judy had begged Jaggard to see her as far as the door, with Hassan leading and Jaggard bringing up the rear. They threaded their way through the narrow, tortuous streets

that reeked with filth, until they came to a stop at last before a narrow, unpainted door, studded with brass nails and ornamented with an exquisite knocker of figured iron. The exterior of the house was merely a wall of mud plaster, without so much as a window; and Judy was unprepared for the surprise that awaited her when the attendant escorted her through a dark passage that led into a spacious court laid out with trees and shrubbery and flowers and paved with the wonderful opalescent *reflet* tiles that are the glory of Persian artisans. A fountain plashed musically in a tiled basin; goldfish darted to and fro in the crystal pool. On each side of the court were doors before which hung superb portières. The air was heavy with the scent of musk and jasmine.

With a low salaam the attendant left her, and Judy, standing beside the crystal pool, had an embarrassed sense of being watched by someone she could not see. She took an uncertain step forward, past a flowering shrub, and

then she saw that a stairway climbed upward from the end of the court beyond the pool, and a man stood, evidently waiting for her, at its foot.

This was plainly Gholam Rezah. He was a short, bulky man, shaggy as a buffalo, with a broad, swarthy face, a grizzled beard and mustache, and a nose shaped like a carrot. He stood in his stockinged feet to receive her, and he wore a lambskin cap, thus fulfilling Persian ideas of good form. He bowed gravely as Judy advanced.

"Peace be unto you!" he said, in the vernacular. And then, in fluent, if rather guttural, English, he inquired after her health and the health of Savidge Sahib. As he talked he conducted her to a divan covered with a tiger skin. From somewhere behind one of the portières came a subdued silken rustle. Judy made a shrewd guess that the eternal feminine stood behind one of those magnificent door coverings. Her imagination thrilled to the beauty and mystery of this surprising house,

in spite of her perplexities, and, also, in spite of the carrot nose of Gholam Rezah!

The pool, the flowering trees, the swinging priceless tapestries, became more than ever like some setting from the *Thousand and One Nights*, when two attendants entered noiselessly, leaving their sandals at the door, to place in front of her, on a low table, a tray of jellied eggs, rose leaf preserves, sweetmeats, and tea. Courtesy compelled her to eat and to reply to the polite nothings of her host; but before the last servant had backed out, taking with him the tea things, she asked Gholam Rezah the question that had been burning on her lips since she entered:

“Is there anything for me—any letter or message?”

Her host shook his head. “There is none, Memsahib. I myself have had no word from the Sahib since a certain letter he wrote me a few days before he was to leave Tiflis.”

“You know of his arrest?”

“A few days ago I learned of it from one of

my men stationed at Tiflis. Anything I can do to aid you or the Sahib I will do. Is it your intention to go on to—”

He made a polite pause. “To Isfahan,” Judy supplied.

In spite of her efforts, her voice trembled a little. She had made so certain there would be a letter or telegram for her from Savidge, that she felt a sickening sense of disappointment now that she learned there was not so much as a word from him. Gholam Reza bent upon her his grizzled, shaggy brows, that moved up or down as he talked, with an astonishing facility.

“You must not be concerned because there is no message from your husband, Memsahib. I hear that he is still held for trial, and under the circumstances it would be useless, if not unwise, to try to communicate with you. Every telegram or letter he sent out would be read by the authorities, and a code or cipher message would be confiscated.”

"How long do you think they can detain him in Tiflis?" she asked.

Rezah's great eyebrows went up ironically. "As long as is necessary for their purpose, Madame, unless he forces them to set him free. Your husband is a very accomplished person, Madame! But the charge against him is conspiracy against an official—a serious offense, on Russian territory."

"Then," said Judy, slowly, "then I shall have to go on alone."

He looked at her questioningly, and she told him about the theft of the packet. His deep-set eyes gleamed and his eyebrows worked alarmingly as he listened. His manner changed. He was no longer the Oriental, suavely offering her tea and polite conversation, but a politician of craft and cunning, who summoned a shrewd mind to weigh every chance and trick of his enemy.

"Wolkonsky is probably in Teheran." He ran over the points against their side. "The

papers stolen from you are on their way to him now, without doubt—”

“But there is only a map and a few words of direction in cipher. Surely he can make nothing of that?” she interrupted.

For the least fraction of a second there shone in the eyes of Gholam Rezah a gleam of Oriental contempt for the feminine mind. But his voice was patiently polite as he assured her no cipher would prove a serious obstacle to the Russian Secret Service.

“Cipher writing was invented in Russia,” he chuckled. “Then what happens? With the aid of your map and your cipher, Wolkonsky will go to this spot, or will send one of his staff; he will find your husband’s valuable plans; he will return to Teheran, where he will put himself into communication with St. Petersburg. After that”—he gave an expressive shrug—“Savidge Sahib will find he has done his work for Russia.”

Judy sat still for a moment, looking down at her clasped hands. Something that was not

at all like the despair and fear she had known since the packet was stolen stirred in her fiercely. She sent a keen glance at the brooding face of Gholam Rezah.

"Could one traveling as fast as possible get to—say, Pasagardae—before a person could reach the same point from Teheran?" she asked.

His eyes gleamed at her under their grizzled thatch.

"You mean?"

"I mean that I am going to get to the place where those plans are hidden first. If I can beat Wolkonsky there, I believe I can find them, map or no map. And I'm going to try. Will you help me, Mr. Rezah?"

The shrewd eyes of the Aga Gholam Rezah expressed something that was almost admiration. He sat for a long time stroking his beard and thinking. Then: "It can be done. A forced journey straight to Isfahan; then south about thirty-seven *farsakhs*, if it be the will of Allah!"

He clapped his hands sharply, and a servant came, to whom he gave an order.

“I have sent for one that will arrange the matter of post-horses. It is necessary to lose no time. Tomorrow, at the sixth hour after sunrise, Nusr-ed-Deen Shah will present himself to you at the caravanserai. By that time all details of the journey will have been attended to. In Isfahan there is one—” He paused to write a name and address on a tablet that he took from his broad girdle. “There is one that will meet you when you arrive. He will aid you under instructions from me. Now, it is necessary to know what escort you have with you, Madame.”

Judy's mind flew to Jaggard. “I have Abdallah ibh Hassan—” Rezah nodded as if satisfied—“and an American that I can depend on, who will go with us as far as Isfahan.”

“That is enough,” he decided. “The roads are safe; a small party travels fast and light. At Isfahan my men will reinforce your guard,

unless it falls out that Savidge Sahib meets you there."

Judy looked up quickly. "Do you think that a possibility?"

Rezah gave a grim nod. "We have a proverb, Memsahib: 'The jackal that lives in the wilds of Mazanderan can only be caught by the hounds of Mazanderan.' Gholam Rezah is going to enter the chase, Madame, and we shall see!"

He tugged at his beard, his half-hidden eyes gleaming under their overhanging brows. Judy sat still, scarcely daring to breathe.

"You tell me he was arrested at the instance of the Khadkhuda of Tiflis?" he asked her, after a moment's thought.

"Yes," she nodded.

A glitter of triumph came into the eyes of Gholam Rezah. For the first time during their interview he showed the points of his yellow teeth in a smile that turned his broad face into the face of a satyr.

"I recall a small affair of the Khadkhuda of Tiflis," he murmured in his beard; "it is convenient to have a good memory. I think, Madame, your husband will not be detained much longer! I shall send an attendant back to the caravanserai with you."

He clapped his hands again. A servant came with lights, two great bowls like amber moons; and another followed with a Chinese lantern in each hand. It had darkened while they talked, and now the courtyard and the pool were full of shadows and soft rustlings. From behind one of the portières came the distant tinkle of some zither-like instrument. Rezah walked with Judith across the courtyard. Ahead of them the lanterns floated down the darkness of the corridor.

"You will know my men," Gholam Rezah lowered his voice, "by the proverb of the jackal of Mazanderan. You will remember it, Madame?"

"I shall remember it," she said. "Thank you, and — *khuda hafiz!*"

Hassan rose up from the stone floor of the anteroom, and Jaggard, the faithful, joined her outside. The two great white muslin lanterns bobbed ahead of them down the inky streets. For the first time since she came out to seek adventure, Judith felt something of the thrill that runs like quicksilver through the veins of the true soldier of fortune when he hears the call of a lost cause. She felt strung to a pitch of exhilaration that made her almost gay. Jaggard looked down at her in thoughtful surprise when she spoke, her voice had in it such a ring of excitement.

"Mr. Jaggard, you like a gambling chance, don't you?" she asked. "Do you want to take one with me? I'm going to Isfahan and then south, a long way south, unless I get other orders. In plain American, I'm going to beat Mr. Serge Wolkonsky to it! Do you want to take a hand?"

A long, slow, seraphic grin split the face of Tom Jaggard into two parts. "Do I want to take a hand? Do I? My dear, you

couldn't keep me out of the game now, not with an ax! Say, I'm for you, understand that? I'd walk from here to Isfahan to beat that Lina woman; but it ain't that altogether, no, not altogether. You, well, you're from Home, you see. Just put me wise to the game and I'll chip in and draw cards."

His voice became suddenly hard. "It's only our edge now, Memsahib; but I reckon when it comes our turn to deal, they won't shift the cut on us, or ring in a cold deck again—not if I can help it!"

CHAPTER XI

ON THE ROAD TO ISFAHAN

IT is five hundred miles, as the crow flies, from Tabriz to Isfahan, and not much farther by way of the ancient caravan route; for the old merchants that carried the first commerce of the Persian Gulf to the provinces of the north had the instinct of birds of passage for the straight line. Judith will remember till she dies that long, swift journey to the ancient capital of Iran—the wonderful Nisf-i Jahan, or “Half the World,” as it was called in the days when Shah Abbas the Great ruled with a rod of iron over the Eastern world. Each day’s journey in the large post-carriage drawn by four lean, galloping horses, took them farther into the south. The earth became darker, the grass greener, gardens and orchards took on deeper hues and a hazy light

spread a soft glow over the landscape. They galloped through tiny villages set in vineyards, they camped at noon under gigantic plane-trees, and halted for the night at mud caravan-serais, where, after the hard day's journey in the stimulating air, they slept undisturbed by the moaning and bubbling of camels, the familiarities of caravan dogs, or the attacks of relentless insects.

They were able to reel off the miles as no native traveler ever thinks of doing, for their way was cleared before them and their wheels oiled by the outrider Nusr-ed-Deen sent ahead. At each rest-house fresh horses awaited them; arrangements for food and fodder had been made; and there was no delay and no discomfort that could be avoided by careful forethought. And yet Judy's face began to show traces of the mental and physical strain she suffered long before the journey was half accomplished. Her mood of exhilaration was succeeded by a determination that kept her tense and feverish, to reach Persepolis be-

fore Wolkonsky or his agents could do so, to find the plans or defend their hiding place, and thus to save the day that had been almost lost through what she called her fault. Fast as they traveled, for her the pace was never fast enough. Time after time Jaggard had to remind her that sitting on the edge of the carriage seat, with her hands clenched and her eyes straining ahead, did not help the horses and used up her own strength. With a long sigh she would settle herself more comfortably in her corner of the post-carriage and make Jaggard go over again his calculations concerning the number of days it should take for her lost packet to reach Wolkonsky's hands, supposing him to be in Teheran.

The result of this calculation always seemed to give her new strength, for Jaggard declared that unless some accident happened to them on the road they would roll into Isfahan before Wolkonsky could possibly reach there.

"Of course," Judith always finished up these discussions, "we are taking it for granted

that he or Miss Arlundsen can make out the cipher, which is impossible."

"Then why are you racing down there to forestall him?"

"It isn't because I haven't faith in our cipher!" she would cry, "but because I've begun to learn that in this game you can never take anything for granted. I lost my map because I took Miss Arlundsen's honesty for granted, and I'm not going to make another mistake for the same reason."

"You've got the right idea," said Jaggard. "You're learning the game! What if you should find Savidge Sahib waiting for you in Isfahan?"

Her eyes widened and glowed. "Why, then," she said, simply, "everything would be all right!"

A curious, bleak look came into Jaggard's face, as if, homeless and solitary, he had glanced through a window and caught a glimpse of another man's lighted hearth. But his voice was almost as blithe as ever when he

said: "Well, whether he's there or not, I'd back you to a showdown. You're game, all the time."

As the heat increased they traveled often at night, when the moon was full and the sky glowed as with white fire and the plane-trees splashed inky shadows across the trail. There was an enchantment about these night journeys that lifted them into the realm of the unreal and fantastic. The faint sound of approaching camel-bells became full of an uncanny suggestion; and the sight of the shaggy beasts swinging along through the ghostly light sent a shiver up the spine, as if one had seen the Great Sphinx nod in the moonlight. These were the only hours of the journey when Judy was able to forget her troubles, in the beauty and the mystery of the ancient land. Wrapped in rugs and huddled in the corner of the carriage, she often fell into a half drowse, in which the world seemed to stream past her like a pale, luminous sea. Once she awoke suddenly after an uneasy

sleep, to see a line of camels drifting silently past, black and weird against the rising moon.

Jaggard, too, was watching the curious sight. "And on Broadway the shows are over and they're making for the lobster palaces," was his comment.

"And they call it life!" Judy added scornfully.

All the years when she had lived in a bronze cage in the overheated air of the Great Southern were now a part of another woman's existence. She could not make even the stories she had dreamed and written seem real, as they had one time been real to her. It seemed as if for years she had been riding on horseback or in a post-carriage, desperately trying to gain some point that lay always miles ahead of her. But in spite of the fatigue and the unreality of that strange, flying journey, there was one reality she never lost sight of: she had failed in a trust, and that failure had to be retrieved.

They rested a night in Hamadan and were

off at dawn next day with never a desire on Judy's part to lose an hour in the bazaars of the rare old town that poets have sung. The necessities of the occasion were calling out in her a stern, practical power of concentration that was stronger even than her imagination or her love of the picturesque.

On the morning of the twelfth day from Tabriz they threaded their way through the maze of walled vineyards, gardens, and blossom-laden orchards that ring Isfahan with riotous color and at a distance resemble the variegated pattern of a carpet from the looms of Khorasan. Back of the city rose a range of serrated hills garbed in the velvety verdure of spring, and against a sky of flawless azure bubbled the turquoise domes of the mosques. Judith looked down on the town and caught her breath. Of all the cities of Persia Isfahan is the most beautiful in a garish way. She is the Painted Lady among the cities of the East, powdered, rouged, and bedizened, reeking of musk and patchouli, tricked out in tinsel and

spangles, roses in her tawny hair and poppies flaming on her breast. Whether seen from the plains or the hills, from the bridges over the Zendah Rud or the Meidan in the heart of the city, the capital of Shah Abbas the Great is a vision that will never fade from the eyes. She is beautiful and superficial and untrustworthy and the center of idleness and intrigue.

Before noon they had passed into the city. They drove at once to the bazaars flanking the Meidan and forced their way through the press of camels, porters, buyers, and sellers. Judy had no eyes for what under other circumstances would have been an enchanted scene. The booths with their brocaded goods, saddlery, weapons and armor, lacquered ware and brass, had no attraction for her now; the rattle and beat of the coppersmith's mallet and the brassworker's hammer fell on heedless ears. She bade Hassan take them at once to a caravanserai.

As soon as a little of the dust of travel had been removed, Judy, accompanied by Jaggard, set out for the telegraph office. They crossed the magnificent Meidan-i-Shah, or Imperial Square, level and smooth as a billiard table; rounded the Nakarah Khanah, the band towers from which a fanfare of trumpets and a roll of kettle-drums accompany the rising and the setting of the sun; and entered the Chahar Bagh, the Avenue of the Four Gardens, which is the Champs Elysees of Isfahan. Jaggard, familiar with the street, stopped before a low plaster building, the color of which suggested to Judy a well-made tomato soup. The dome was threaded with black wires and out of the open doors came the drowsy sound of telegraph instruments. Across the avenue, under a sycamore tree, lounged a native letter-writer, his utensils laid neatly on an ochre-colored cloth. By his side were the kalem-dan, or reed-holder, and several rolls of paper. He seemed to be asleep,

but a close observer would have noticed that under his half-closed eyelids he watched every movement of the two *farangi* as they entered the office.

In the vernacular Jaggard asked the operator, who was a fine, melancholy-browed young Persian, if there was a telegram for Mrs. Savidge. The operator looked through his file, flashed his white teeth in a smile, and answered that there had been a telegram for Mrs. Savidge, which that lady had called for, received and carried away with her two hours before.

"What? Say that again!" Jaggard snapped.

The man repeated his statement, this time in broken English. Judy's hands flew to her heart.

"What does he mean?" she gasped.

Jaggard's thumbs mechanically sought the edge of his trousers pocket; he struck his habitual attitude, feet far apart, his head and shoulders thrust forward. For a full minute he studied the man before him. Then he

leaned forward across the barrier that stretched between the inner and outer rooms.

"Now, my friend," he said, crisply, "let's understand each other. You say a wire came for Mrs. John Savidge, that Mrs. Savidge called for and received it two hours ago. Have I got that straight?"

The operator politely made it clear that this was the exact situation.

"Very well, then; describe this Mrs. Savidge—in English, please."

The man made a gesture of vast admiration. Shorn of much hyperbole, his reply indicated that Mrs. Savidge was tall, stately as the young sarv tree, with eyes like the winter sky and hair the color of ripe wheat. The operator was eloquent and manifestly honest.

"You should be a novelist, my son," Jaggard interrupted him dryly, "for as a telegraph operator you're punk! You've given the message to the wrong lady. This is the real Mrs. Savidge."

The operator looked limp, and Judy went white to the lips.

"Who got it, then?" she whispered. "It couldn't be—"

"Lina? Surest thing you know! But where did she pass us? We left her in Tabriz . . . but that doesn't matter now." He turned to the operator. "See here, my friend, you've made a mistake, and the best thing you can do now is to give Mrs. Savidge a duplicate of that wire. Then everything will be agreeable all around, and we'll overlook the incident, see?"

The operator shook his head firmly. Jaggard tried persuasion and threats. The man became moist and mournful, but he remained loyal to the rules of the company. Even the high sign of the brotherhood of the key had no power to move him. And at last they left him unwillingly.

Once more in the street, they looked at each other. Jaggard's wrinkled face was tragically humorous, but Judy could not have

forced a smile had her life depended on it. She felt benumbed by the blow. It seemed an extraordinarily cruel prank of luck that lost her this message she had been hoping for every mile on the long road from Tabriz. Intuition told her the wire was from Savidge—probably a direction in their cipher or code. If in the code, it would be no good to Miss Arlundsen; but what was of greater moment, its loss meant to Judith continued ignorance of her husband's whereabouts, and left her in a state of nerve-racking uncertainty.

"If I only knew where he is or what he would have me do!" she cried, twisting her hands together.

Jaggard took her firmly by the arm and turned her face towards the Meidan. "If he were here he'd make you rest, that's sure. And that's what you've got to do. We're going back to the caravanserai, and while you lie down I'm going to circulate around a bit."

They retraced their steps along the tree-embowered avenue. The letter-writer gath-

ered up the implements of his craft, slung the cloth over his shoulder and followed at a discreet distance. They crossed the Meidan, shouldered their way through the crowded bazaars and reached the comparative seclusion of the *bala-khanah*. Jaggard extracted a promise from Judy that she would rest, and left her.

She threw herself down on her rugs and tried not to think of her disappointment; but in spite of herself her mind circled around and around the problem of what she ought to do next. Hassan brought her a cup of tea. She was drinking it sitting, a forlorn little person, on the corner of her rugs, when she heard the click of Jaggard's heels coming down the corridor. Mingling with them sounded the patter of native sandals. The instant he entered the *bala-khanah* Judith knew by her friend's face that his spirits had risen.

"Say," he began, "there's a native letter-writer out here that wants to write for the

Memsahib. Will you let him come in?"

"But I have no one to write to!" she protested. "And I'm too tired. Send him away, please."

"You might send a letter to Ġholam Rezah, just a polite note to let him know you've got here safely," Jaggard persisted.

He looked over his shoulder. The letter-writer was not visible, but his shadow fell over the threshold. "The fellow is so determined to see you I think he's got something to say. You'd better let him come in and see what comes of it."

Jaggard stepped to the door and beckoned to the letter-writer, who at once appeared on the threshold. He salaamed low and murmured something in the vernacular, which Jaggard interpreted.

"He wants to know if the lady whose loveliness shames the moon on the 14th night and puts the stars to flight will honor her servant. He's a very learned chap, says he can write in Persian, Arabic, and French."

"As I don't know any of those languages, you must dictate for me," Judy laughed.

Jaggard nodded to the letter-writer, who dropped on his knees, spread out his cloth, and laid on it several rolls of snowy rice paper and the kalem-dan, an oblong box with a convex top, exquisitely inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Out of this box he took a small brass inkstand, a stick of sealing-wax, and a reed pen. Holding the paper on the palm of his left hand, he dipped the pen into the ink.

"I don't sling much of a style," said Jaggard, "but here goes: *To Aga Gholam Reza, Greeting: We have come down as far as Isfahan, making the journey in twelve days without incident. The arrangements at the post-houses were satisfactory, and we had no trouble about the horses. Is that too fast for you?*"

The hand of the letter-writer flew over the paper lightly, writing from right to left diagonally across the paper. When he had done he looked carefully about the *bala-khanah*.

Then he spoke in a low voice, in clearly enunciated English:

"Is it by any chance that this letter goes to Aga Gholam Rezah of Tabriz?"

Jaggard gave no outward sign of surprise. "To Gholam Rezah of Tabriz. You know of him?"

"Assuredly," answered the letter-writer. "Who else in all Persia is better known than Gholam Rezah? We come from the same birthplace, he and I." He looked at Judy with his bright brown eyes. "We are of Mazanderan, Memsahib."

Judy started at the word and leaned forward. "I have heard that in Mazanderan they have many proverbs—"

The letter-writer took the words out of her mouth. "We of that province have a proverb—perhaps the Memsahib has heard of it? We say that the jackal that lives in the wilds of Mazanderan can only be caught by the hounds of Mazanderan."

"I have heard it," answered Judy. "It

was in the house of Gholam Rezah."

"It is well said. Then I am to tell you that he has left Isfahan, and gone south."

"He? Whom do you mean?"

The letter-writer rose to his feet, slipped noiselessly to the doorway, and glanced up and down the corridor. He came closer to Judy as he replied: "I was to tell you that the man you fear has gone south."

"Wolkonsky?" she whispered.

The letter-writer nodded.

"Is this true?" demanded Jaggard, fixing the native with his keen glance.

"All the world may tell lies," answered the letter-writer, simply, "but when did Gholam Rezah ever betray his friends?"

"True; that is all true. And it does not profit anyone to lie to the friends of Gholam Rezah."

"Did I not know the proverb that Gholam Rezah gave to the Memsahib?"

Jaggard nodded. "These are matters that cannot be left to chance, my brother."

“Assuredly. The hired servants of Russia are everywhere. On every hand is intrigue. Even the court of Teheran is in league with the Czar. But this is not for long. There are brave men ready to lay down their lives for the Cause. They are only waiting for the signal. When that is given they will rise and Persia will be free. I, too, am a patriot. That is why I am here to help the friends of Gholam Reza, but if it should be known what I have just said, my life would be forfeited. I might eat again, but not twice!”

“Enough, brother!” said Jaggard. “You are no letter-writer of the bazaars.”

“Before entering the Cause under Gholam Reza I sought instruction at the Gates of Learning in many lands—at Heidelberg, at Oxford, and at your own Yale. Before Persia can be free her young men must have knowledge of the world.”

Jaggard grasped his hand. “I can’t give you any of the High Signs, brother, for I never rode the frat goat; but you’re all wool

and a yard wide! What is the rest of this tale?"

The letter-writer moved nearer. "Four days ago I received word from Gholam Rezah. I was charged to watch in Isfahan until you came. He sent word also that Wolkonsky had been in Tabriz — with the woman. You understand?"

"In Tabriz! With Miss Arlundsen!" gasped Judy. "When?"

"Wolkonsky was in Tabriz even on the day you arrived there. The tall woman went at once to him in the house of Salar-ed-Ali. They had a long conference. That night, the night you were in the house of Gholam Rezah, Wolkonsky left for the South. Rezah did not know of these things until you had gone."

"And the woman?"

"The woman remained until the next day. You left Tabriz the seventh hour after sunrise. On the ninth hour the woman followed by post-carriage."

"Then she was behind us all the way!" cried Judy. Jaggard nodded as if confirming his own judgment.

"She was behind you until the fifth hour after sunset of yesterday. You stopped at the rest-house for the night. She changed horses there at midnight and came on to Isfahan."

Jaggard's face wrinkled with cunning. "How is it, brother, you know these things that happened on the road?"

The letter-writer gave no sign of resentment. "These things, and many more also, are known to me because of what I have said. Think you, Sahib, that the word cannot be passed other than on the wings of lightning? The Cause is no small thing, Sahib. In every province, in every city and town, even in the rest-houses along the way, men are banded together to bring this thing about. They have their own way of knowing one another, and their own way of passing the word."

A shadow of a smile flickered over the

dark, thin face. "Is it beyond the Sahib's belief that the drivers of the post-carriage might also be of the Cause?"

Jaggard grinned. "The game is well played, brother," he said, heartily. "I was at fault. Go on."

"Here in Isfahan, Wolkonsky was at the caravanserai when the woman arrived this morning before dawn. They had much talk. What the talk was is not known to me, for the corridor outside the *bala-khanah* was guarded and my men could not get near. Once they summoned the na'ib—he is also of the Cause—and he reported that they studied maps and papers. He could learn no more."

Judy shot a meaningful glance at Jaggard. "Yes—go on!" he said.

"On the second hour after sunrise this morning the woman went to the telegraph station. I myself followed her. She received a telegram and returned to the *bala-khanah*. An hour later the Russian and two men left the caravanserai. They rode over the Zendah

Rud, through Julfa, and followed the caravan road to the south. That is all."

"But what of the woman?" asked Jaggard.

"The woman is in Isfahan."

"Are you sure?"

"Memsahib, a mouse could not creep out of Isfahan today without my knowledge! The city is surrounded by men of the Cause. It is the order of Aga Rezah."

Jaggard turned to Judy. "The thing's as plain as the nose on my face. They've drawn cards, and it's up to us to boost the pot and start the ball to rolling."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just this: the Lina woman has read your cipher!"

The world seemed slipping from under Judy's feet. Her face was haggard and the corners of her mouth twitched pitifully. The letter-writer, with the tact of the Oriental, moved towards the door.

"I can't believe it!" she whispered. "No one in the world could read that cipher!"

"Mrs. Savidge," Jaggard said, quietly, "we haven't any time to waste in talk. Wolkonsky has got your papers and map and he's on his way to find your husband's plans. You haven't told me where they're hidden, but I'm ready to gamble they're south of here. Wolkonsky was headed south two hours after sunrise this morning. What's the answer? They've read your cipher, and you'll have to admit it."

"But I tell you they couldn't!" Judy persisted frantically. "No one could read it without the key-word."

"Then they've got the key-word." He began walking up and down the *bala-khanah*. As he walked he absently took a coin from his pocket and it began slipping like a live thing in and out between his incredible fingers.

"Look here," he said at last. "I haven't butted into your business, have I? I haven't asked a single question and I don't intend to. But you're out here alone and up against it, and, by gad! I'm going to help you. Now

listen: Lina Arlundsen is onto your cipher. Why did Wolkonsky leave for the South as soon as he had his confab with the Arlundsen woman in Tabriz? Because he had the translation of your cipher. Why did he leave Isfahan this morning? Because the woman translated your husband's telegram for him. It's as plain as two and two make four."

He stopped in his walk and faced her. "I know something about ciphers, Mrs. Savidge. I've collected a lot of queer ones in my travels. You say yours can be read by means of the key-word?"

Judy nodded.

"You use figures—two figures to represent each letter?"

"Yes."

"I know that cipher—the Nihilists of Russia use it and it's the greatest one ever invented. You're right—it can only be read with the key-word."

"I knew I was right!" Judy began, triumphantly.

"Wait! What's to prevent a person from finding out the key-word?"

"Impossible! Think of all the words in the language! Think of the difficulty of hitting on the right word among thousands!"

"Ordinarily, yes. In this case, no. I'll bet I can read your cipher, Mrs. Savidge."

She defied him with her indignant eyes to prove his assertion. He smiled back at her good-naturedly.

"Let me see . . . you were married just before you came abroad. Then you were on your honeymoon when your husband taught you this cipher, weren't you?"

"Really, I don't see what my private affairs have to do with this business!"

The wrinkles gathered under Jaggard's eyes. "Your private affairs have everything to do with it. I've told you before that guessing is my business. Well, I'm going to make another guess, it's only a guess, mind you, so you mustn't take exception to what I say. I'm going to guess that a man that is just mar-

ried, and who is very much in love with his wife, wouldn't have to bone a dictionary for a key-word to fit his cipher. Isn't that reasonable?"

Judy colored and admitted it was very reasonable.

"I don't think he'd look in a book for that word," Jaggard went on imperturbably. "And I reckon Lina Arlundsen doped it out the same way."

"You think—"

"I think that *Judith* is a very pretty name! Miss Arlundsen thinks so too. In fact, she told me so that day in the *bala-khanah* when I asked her for your papers. I didn't think much about it at the time, but a good guesser goes back and picks up every straw. I know now that the minute the Arlundsen woman heard your name, she decided to see if that key would unlock your cipher. Do you see?"

Judy's eyes were round with astonishment and dark with fear. "And she succeeded! What will she do now?"

"She'll stay here to spy on you and prevent any communication between you and your husband, if she can. In the meantime Wolkonsky is going south—where, I don't know."

"To Persepolis," she said, under her breath.

"And no one knows where John Savidge is. But there's no use waiting for him, he'll take care of himself. There's no use waiting here for orders, for they've got it framed up against you. My advice is to try to beat him to it. Gholam Rezah's offered you an escort; why not hit the trail? I'd like a chance at that cute Russian myself—for Lina's sake."

"Call the letter-writer in," was Judy's answer.

The somber-eyed Persian came back. Jaggard glanced into the corridor for a possible eavesdropper. It was empty except for Hassan, who sat smoking, wrapped in his burnous, just beyond the door.

"In the message that Gholam Rezah sent

you, was there any news of Savidge Sahib?" Judy asked the letter-writer.

The man bowed. "I was to tell you that Gholam Rezah sent word to Savidge Sahib of your loss, and of your journey south. Also I was to tell you to expect the release of Savidge Sahib soon."

Judy's face brightened somewhat at this. By comparing dates with the native they came to the conclusion that Rezah had sent his message to the letter-writer about five days after they left Tabriz. In the week that had elapsed since then, the prophecy of Rezah might have come true. There was every probability that Savidge was on his way to Isfahan and Persepolis at the moment they stood discussing his movements. And also, it was much more certain that Wolkonsky was speeding nearer to Persepolis with every minute they wasted.

"These men that Gholam Rezah has promised me in case I go south—can they

fight?" Judy suddenly turned upon the letter-writer.

A cryptic smile lighted the face of the native. "Memsahib, Gholam Rezah has sent out the word that we are to spare nothing, neither money nor lives, if necessary, to aid the thing that Savidge Sahib is trying to bring about."

Judith turned to Jaggard. "How many men should we need?"

"I should say not more than two. The lighter we travel the faster."

Judith's eyes gleamed. "Yes, yes, we must travel as fast as possible. How long will it take to get the horses ready?"

The letter-writer held up a dissuading hand. It would be better to leave Isfahan after dark, just before the moon rose. The Memsahib should eat and rest before the journey. At the second hour after sunset horses and men would be ready beyond the south wall of the bazaars, and a rider would

be sent ahead to arrange for fresh horses at each stage.

Foosteps sounded along the corridor and the letter-writer dropped to his knees before the inkstand. Jaggard made a pretense of going on with the dictation. Judith stepped outside into the gallery to think. As she stood looking down into the courtyard a fanfare of trumpets sounded from the Nakarah Khanah. The brazen sound was like a call to battle. Judith shivered as she listened. Then she went back into the *bala-khanah* and spoke to the letter-writer.

“If Savidge Sahib passes through Isfahan,” she said, “you are to tell him that I have gone to the Lost City. To the Lost City, you understand? And that I am not afraid.”

The letter-writer bowed. “He shall receive the very word, Memsahib, that you are not afraid.”

CHAPTER XII

THE TELLER OF TALES

ON the second morning after Judy and her escort had crossed the Zendah Rud and galloped down the ancient caravan route to the south, a man tall and gaunt of face, mounted on a handsome bay stallion, rode slowly into Isfahan. The horse was jaded, the drooping head and quivering nostrils denoting long and hard riding; and the broad-sleeved abba of brown, which the rider wore over a tight-fitting undergarment of bright yellow that reached to the knees like a surplice, was powdered with dust. The tall red fez was improvised into a turban by means of strands of white cloth bound round the head, the white folds contrasting saliently with the sunburnt brown of the rider's face. In the center of his forehead was a scar, white as bone—the mark of the Bagdad “date.”

Although he rebuked a beggar that clawed at his stirrup, in the argot of the bazaars, his eyes did not play their part so well. Of a cool, clear, hazel-gray, they were not characteristic of the Orient, and the crow's-feet at their corners gave them a quizzical effect that is never seen in the men of the East. Neither did he ride as the men of the desert ride. In the length of the stirrup, in the way he gripped the leather with thighs rather than with knees, and in the careless, half lounging yet secure seat, there was a suggestion of the American cowboy. An almost imperceptible slope to the left shoulder accentuated the awkwardness of his carriage, but whether his horse trotted or galloped, the man's seat was as square and solid as his hand on the rein was light and firm.

Entering the city from the north, he forced his way through the press of the bazaars to the caravanserai. Leaving his horse in charge of the na'ib, he made his way down one of the tortuous streets on the east of the Meidan, a

street so narrow that he could have touched with outstretched arms the houses on each side. The dingy, crowding walls were corbelled out so that the projecting eaves of the flat roofs almost touched overhead, filling the narrow passageway with a cool, crepuscular light, as if the city had been concealed in an oubliette of titanic trees.

He stopped before a house whose window, set high up in the wall, was covered with an iron grating. The low, narrow door was studded with brass nails. He was ushered into a long room opening on an inner courtyard where a tiled fountain was playing in the sunshine. In the center of this room a man wearing a tarboosh and horn spectacles sat cross-legged on a handsome rug before a low table covered with writing materials. The tall man in Arab garments left his slippers at the door and made a profound salaam. The Persian rose to his feet and returned the salutation.

“*Sabbah-ak Allah bi'l khayt*—[Allah give thee good-morning]!” he said.

“Peace be unto thee, man of letters,” returned the other, gravely.

Then in English: “That’s one on you, Nadir Shah! Set them up, you old reprobate! I haven’t had a drink or a decent smoke since I left Tiflis!”

The Persian snatched off his spectacles, and the frown of bewilderment was followed by a smile of welcome that lighted up the somber face and brooding eyes.

“Savidge Sahib!” he exclaimed, softly. “What is predestined, that must needs be! Thou hast come in good time!”

They shook hands in the manner of the West. The Persian’s eyes took in every detail of the disguise. “I was expecting thee,” he said, in his own tongue, “but not in this favor. Beyond question thou art a merchant of Bagdad! It is wonderful! That scar—it would pass thee into the shrine of Husein at

Kerbela. *Aie!* I know of but one in all Persia that could render such good account of the orpiment and walnut juice."

Savidge nodded. "It was he, Mehomet Hassan Khan, in the shop of the Sunnee barber at Enzeli. No one in the East has such dye for the face."

"*Nali kadeem est!* He has none of the newfangled dyes that fade in a day or a week. Who should know that better than I, who have been hunted from Mazanderan to the Gulf?"

"I also have had occasion to test his dyes—when a blotched skin would have meant a knife from ear to ear." Savidge shrugged his shoulders and dropped on the rug beside Nadir Shah's table. "I'm hungry, thirsty, and dying for a smoke, and you're the only man in Persia civilized enough to drink brandy-and-soda. Do you still import Henry Clays?"

An attendant brought refreshments, and Savidge, sitting cross-legged like a native, ate

and rapidly sketched for Nadir Shah the incidents of his release from official clutches in Tiflis through the influence of Gholam Rezah. One of Rezah's men had brought him word of Judy's loss; and from that moment he had spared neither himself nor his horses. The ride south had been, as he put it, an unholy scramble. From Tiflis he had gone to Baku by rail, and from Baku across the Caspian to Enzeli, where a heavy fog had kept them from landing for half a day. He had been followed to Enzeli by two of Wolkonsky's men. He was sure of that. So he had gone to the shop of the Sunnee barber and had come forth an Arab merchant, walking under the eyes of the Russian's men without arousing suspicion. From Enzeli he rode to Kasvin, and then to Hamadan, traveling most of the way by night. A day's ride from Isfahan he had met the word going north that the Memsahib and her escort had left Isfahan and were trailing Wolkonsky to the south. The news had aroused him to new effort, and with the aid of the men

of the Cause, who had kept him supplied with good horses, he had made Isfahan in five days.

“And now, brother,” he concluded, lighting a cigar from the box that Nadir Shah opened with a solemnity amounting almost to prayer, and heaving a long sigh of contentment as he blew a cloud of smoke to the arabesqued ceiling, “what has befallen while I have been on the road? I was told by one at Sultanabad that you would have news for me.”

Nadir Shah told his story simply, without any of the embellishments dear to the heart of the flowery Persian. He told how Gholam Rezah had charged him to engage horses and men and to spare neither lives nor money to further the Sahib and the Memsahib on their way; how in the guise of a letter-writer he had watched the bazaars for Wolkonsky, and how he had haunted the sycamore tree opposite the telegraph office waiting for the Memsahib.

Savidge listened impassively, smoking his cigar in silence. “Good business,” he said, when Nadir had finished. “One thing have

I learned in the East—when in trouble go to Gholam Rezah, and to the house of Nadir Shah.”

The Persian’s face flushed darkly. “*Cheezi nist*, it is nothing!” he exclaimed. “But Gholam Rezah, ah! Sahib, that is right. Gholam Rezah knows everything, and nothing is too great for him to do for a friend.”

“Thou also, Nadir Shah.”

“Thou and he are not little people, Savidge Sahib. What I have done is for the honor of my house.”

“I know,” said Savidge. “But the demands of friendship are heavy. I still have need of thee, brother.”

“Thou hast only to ask and it is done.”

“I am sure of that, Nadir Shah. I have come to thy house as a merchant of Bagdad. But it will not be wise to ride alone to the south as a trafficker in merchandise. So I shall go forth as Abd-al-Malik, a teller of tales. I shall have need of simpler clothes.”

“It shall be as the Sahib wishes. But is it

good that he ride alone? The South is a rough and hostile country, and the Bakhtiari would plunder their kinsmen's graves."

Savidge smiled and reminded his host that he had not known him as the merchant of Bagdad; was it likely they would know the teller of tales? "Remember," he added, "I have journeyed to Herat and to Mecca and have worshipped in the mosques of Meshed. I know all the genuflections and can pray the five prayers of the faithful."

"Assuredly thou art one of us, Savidge Sahib."

Savidge watched a smoke ring whirl to the ceiling. "I used to be more Mohammedan than Christian for a fact," he mused. "Queer, though, how a chap changes as he grows older. Do you know, a year ago I thought I never could go back to the desperately dull routine of civilized life—you know, they haven't learned how to live in my country. It's only here in the East that you fellows with money understand that life is a fine art. Up there in

Tiflis I had lots of time to think about things, and I was lonesome, mighty lonesome. Never felt that way before! And I got to figuring how having a home in a clean, safe place might have its advantages after all."

Nadir Shah smiled. "We Persians have a proverb: 'Only he that is without a wife or has many wives, rides far into the desert!'"

"That hits home all right," admitted Savidge. "To tell the truth, my friend, I'm losing my nerve."

The Persian raised his eyebrows incredulously. "Savidge Sahib afraid? That is what your compatriots would call — ah, yes — funny!"

"Funny or not, it's a fact. When that gauzy old boat got lost in the fog off Enzeli I began to wonder if I'd ever reach land again; and all the way down here I rode with a heavy hand on the curb for fear the horse would stumble and I'd break my neck!"

"And yet thou art going into the South alone."

"That's a part of the game. I can play it better alone," Savidge rejoined, simply. "A wandering teller of tales arouses no suspicion. Believe me, brother, it is the best way."

"But the Bakhtiari—what can you do against them alone?"

"They will welcome me to their fires. The name of Abd-al-Malik is not altogether unknown in the South. They will remember his tales of *Alf Laylah wa Laylah*."

There was a dreamy expression in the eyes that watched the blue smoke curling up from the cigar. "You should see them, Nadir Shah—the old men wagging their beards and the women cackling over the adventures of the Porter of Bagdad or the story of the Wazir's son and the Bath-keeper's wife. You know those yarns—the rarest of all the Nights? I've told them all over the East. And they've got me food and a blanket to sleep on in many a camp where a white man would have his throat cut on sight. I shall never forget those wonderful nights. So long as I live the bitter

smoke will be in my nostrils and I shall see the light of the fires flickering on their dark faces. Allah has been very good to me, Nadir Shah. I have lived!"

"And when the game is played, Sahib?"

The lean outlander shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands, palm upward, in a depreciatory gesture.

"Who knows?" he answered. "I'm a good enough Moslem to believe in Kismet. What will be will be, and I'm content that it is so. I've played the game for the sake of the game, for the glory of doing good work and knowing that it was good. If I win, the men of my profession will say the work's not half bad, and that's reward enough for this world. But win or lose, the great captains that have put up the money will fold their hands over their fat paunches and haggle over the expense account."

He finished his cigar in silence and rose lazily to his feet. "So she told you to tell me she wasn't afraid—eh?"

Nadir Shah nodded assent. "Such was the Memsahib's command."

"Good girl!" muttered the other under his breath. "I knew she had it in her, from the first." He turned to his host. "How's that for pluck, Nadir Shah?"

The Persian smiled cryptically and put his hand on his friend's arm. "Assuredly," he said, "a man might ride far into the desert with such a woman."

"And for such a woman, eh, my friend?"

"Such is the custom of the Sahibs, I believe. And when does Abd-al-Malik ride to the south?"

"At sunset. They have two days the start of me, but I'll catch them before they get to Pasagardae if the horses hold out."

"Have no fear of the horses, Sahib. Word has been sent out by Gholam Rezah all along the road. The men of the Cause are behind you in this thing. We play different games to the same end—the clipping of the Bear's claws—the Russian Bear."

“It is so. And the game is drawing to an end for me. Down there in the South is the man that Persia should most fear, the man that will bring your country under the Czar’s scepter if any one man can. I’ve got him where I want him now, down there in the desert, and it’ll be a man’s fight this time, face to face, with no Cossacks or magistrates or laws to help him. He has had everything his own way so far, but I’m figuring I’ll have something to say down there in the Lost Cities. Well, I shall need a little sleep if I get out at sunset. Will you see about the clothes for the teller of tales, Nadir, and get me another horse? I shall have to ride like the Prophet before tomorrow morning!”

The Persian nodded slowly. “Everything will be in readiness an hour before sunset, and Allah speed you, Savidge Sahib!”

Three days later Abd-al-Malik, a teller of tales from Bagdad, rode across the plain of Murghab. Between him and the purple circle of hills lay mile after mile of plain, silent,

desolate, oppressive: withering under a brazen sun. In the heat of the hour before noon his horse's head dropped and he himself sat wearily in his saddle, the white sand dust from the desert caking in the perspiration of his face. Barren of tree or shrub the desert spun out around him to a point where a solitary shaft of stone reared itself towards the sun.

This was not the first time he had seen this shaft; but never before had the tremendous and significant loneliness of the thing struck him so sharply. In this desert over which it watched, once stood Pasagardae, the seat of kings. The sands had long since swallowed palaces and streets, but this solitary megalith remained, forever announcing to the jackals and the stars: "I am Cyrus the King."

Tossing the bridle over his horse's head so that it trailed on the ground, Abd-al-Malik stretched himself out in the shadow of the rock. The horse, left to himself, nibbled the

scanty herbage of the desert, but did not stray far from his master. The man slept for four hours. When he awoke, the sun was sloping to the west and the broken top of the megalith glowed a dull red.

The teller of tales rose lazily from the ground, yawned, and stretched himself. Then he took from the saddle-horn a water-skin and from the saddle-bag a piece of *sandjiak* and some date paste. As he ate this frugal meal he sat at the foot of the shaft and talked to the horse, which came nuzzling and sniffing at the breast of the gray abba. Cranes with flamingo crests stalked in the dry reeds nearby; and overhead the sinister black of buzzards was silhouetted against the brilliant blue of the sky. The teller of tales glanced from the circling buzzards to certain rings of blackened sand that were scattered about the foot of the megalith.

“Bakhtiari, I should say, Billy,” he remarked aloud. “We’re in their country.

Those fires haven't been cold more than twenty-four hours. We'll go on when I've eaten this *sandjiak*, old boy."

Resting on an elbow he contemplated the black stone of the megalith and discoursed to Billy on the mutability of kings. Like many men that are taciturn among their fellows, Savidge could be whimsically loquacious when alone; and by the simple expedient of postulating privity and percipience on the part of an animal he could banter many a black hour away. In point of fact, this mental exercise operates on the principle of a safety valve, and men that are much alone in the wide spaces of the world soon learn to recognize it as such and to cultivate it as a gift tossed down from the gods to keep the mind wholesome and sane.

"He was a great man and a great king, Billy, this Cyrus, the Achæmenian. But, like a great many big men, he lost his head over a woman. That's a joke, Billy, though you won't see it any more than Cyrus did. The

lady's name was Tomyris, Billy; she was the first suffragette in history. She came down here with an army, lopped off Cyrus's head, and sent it home to his folks in a wine-skin filled with blood. Fact, Billy! I can imagine her passing by here and looking up scornful-like at Cyrus's stony boast. That inscription is all right as far as it goes, but down here at the bottom he should have put—well, I'll be damned!"

Savidge started forward and examined the second stone of the shaft. Underneath the cuneiform inscription: "I am Cyrus the King, the Achæmenian," was a row of figures freshly scratched on the face of the ancient rock; and below these was scrawled faintly the single word "Judy."

For the first few seconds he could only stand staring at that one little word. Then his mind leaped at the row of figures. It was a fragment written in their cipher, with more than one mistake, as if the writer had scratched down the words in desperate haste.

"Captured . . . Bakhtiar . . . " was all; but Savidge felt as if the story of what had happened on this spot was blazoned to the last detail on the surface of the rock.

For a long minute he stood staring at the cipher and the one faint little word, so fixed and motionless that the horse pricked its ears forward and in turn stood still.

"Billy," said the man at last, softly, "we've got work to do, you and I."

He patted the horse's neck and breathed into its nostrils. The horse whinnied as the man tightened its girths.

"It's up to you, old boy," he said, as he sprang into the saddle.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LOST CITY

BILLY raised his head, mumbled his bit, and drew a long, nostril-quivering breath. Savidge chirruped, and the horse struck into the easy lope that horses of the East as well as the West can maintain from sun-up to sun-down.

At first the road stretched like a thread across a treeless plain as level as the sea and flanked with purple-looming hills. Then it ascended gradually for miles, until it entered a mountain pass. By this time the sun was behind the mountains and the horse had to pick his way carefully in the uncertain light. Then the moon, almost at her full, rose and dropped a silver-white drapery on the mountain walls. In places the trail was so narrow that Savidge could look into the fathomless

gloom of the gorge below, a gloom untouched by the moon. Then the road descended, twisting through craggy defiles, crossing the turbulent Polvar on a narrow causeway hewn through solid limestone rock, winding through a series of ravines, diving into a succession of valleys, and eventually debouching into the Plain of Mervdasht. The moon now rode high in the heavens, the cloudless sky glowed with a brilliant, incandescent fire, and the huddled shadow of horse and rider bobbed fantastically on the saffron-colored floor of the level plain. Far ahead, several points of light began to twinkle through the gloom.

"We're almost there, Billy," said Savidge, drawing the horse down to a walk and patting him on the neck. "If the stars haven't lied to us, she's over yonder by those fires. Understand, Billy? She's there—Judy, the only Judy!"

Billy nodded his head sympathetically. The man went on: "I'll tell you a secret, Billy, if you'll promise not to give me away."

Billy promised with his ears. "Old fellow, I want to see her more than I want anything in this world or the next! Funny, isn't it? That little slip of a girl, with her steady eyes, and her face that lights up as if it had a flame behind it, and her quick little brain, and her way of taking orders like a soldier!"

Something black scuttled across the trail, and Billy stopped dead in his tracks. Savidge, sitting loosely in his saddle, peered forward to where the dancing fire-points glimmered like glow-worms against a velvety curtain. The night wind rustled silkily through the grasses, and there floated to his ears the ululant plaint of jackals and the obscene laugh of hyenas.

As they plodded on through the night, the dancing fire-points grew larger and larger; they glowed through the gloom like the ends of lighted cigars; they became bobbing lanterns; and eventually they materialized into camp-fires. Straining his eyes through the uncertain light, Savidge could make out a village of tents, inky blotches in the moon-

light, and above the plain, a huge black bulk floating uncannily in a sea of amber mist. It was like the sudden apparition of a great ship out of a fog.

“The rock tombs of Naksh-i-Rustam,” muttered Savidge. “I might have guessed they’d camp there; Billy, old boy, it looks as if we’d got to the journey’s end. If there’s any magic in the yarns of Sindbad, you’ll fare royally for the rest of the night. And I—Billy, you know what your namesake said—‘Journeys end in lovers meeting, as every wise man’s son doth know’! Never heard of it, eh? Billy, I’m ashamed of you! You’ve neglected the higher side of your nature! I suppose you’d rather munch hay than metaphysics, and bolt a bolus of oats than Fletcherize a cud of poetic thought!”

And so he rode through the dark, with a whimsey on his lips, as he had ridden many times in other years on long and lonely journeys through the sinister places of earth. There was a lilt in his heart that never before

had companioned him in adventure or on quest. As with all men that have to do with big things, his moments of supreme attainment had been sad; but on this night, as he faced the most desperate situation of his career, he was buoyant as a boy, recklessly and riotously happy.

He was carrying on a quixotic dialogue with his horse, and riding carelessly, when, as if they had materialized out of the night air, two figures loomed up at Billy's head. Their hands gripped the bridle rein, and Savidge looked down into the muzzle of a long gun that appeared particularly sinister in the moonlight.

"Pidar sokhtah!" [son of a burnt father] a guttural voice cried. "Get down and surrender!"

"I am in your hands, brothers," said Savidge, calmly, making no movement in the saddle.

"Art thou a kafir [unbeliever]?" asked a voice.

"A wandering teller of tales, and a hadji of Bagdad, thanks to Allah, the merciful and compassionate."

There was an instant's silence in which it was evident that the two outposts looked at each other as if in uncertainty whether this night-rider spoke the truth. At last one of them said:

"In the name of Allah, thou art welcome, O teller of tales, and hadji of Bagdad. But what brings thee beyond the borders of Far-sistan?"

"Much travel is needed to ripen a man, brother!"

"True, O teller of tales. But also it is true that he who has seen the world tells many a lie!"

"Thou art wise, brother; and it may be that thou hast heard of Abd-al-Malik. I bring the latest gossip of the bazaars of Bagdad and Isfahan!"

A second pause of consideration. Then:

"Thou art welcome to the camp of Amir

Mujahid. Pass on, brother, and may thy nose never lose its fat nor thy shadow its bulk, Tomorrow, please Allah, we shall hear thy tales."

The Bakhtiari disappeared as mysteriously as they had appeared, and Savidge, dismounting and leading his horse, picked his way towards the flickering fires of the camp. He could hear ahead of him the faint sound of voices, and, halting for a moment to listen, he would have taken his oath that he heard a word or two of English. A few rods farther on he stopped again, this time in some amazement, for there came to his ears a dry and nasal chuckle. The chuckle was followed by a voice—an unmistakably American voice—discoursing in fluent Persian, liberally interlarded with American slang. A clump of dwarfed trees blocked all sight of what was going on in front of him, but upon flanking this obstruction, Savidge had a clear view of the nomad camp.

A dozen scattered fires threw fantastic shad-

ows upon a huge, scarped wall of stone that heaved itself out of the earth and in the moonlight appeared to tower up to the very stars—the great rocky cliff of Naksh-i-Rustam, in the bosom of which are hewn the sepulchers of the Achæmenian kings. The flames lighted up the base of the rock and flickered on the huge bas-reliefs of men and beasts, until they appeared to quiver and grin as if they were about to be warmed out of their stone sleep.

But Savidge, standing in the thick, soft shadows of the night, had no eyes for the tombs of once puissant kings, or for the towering cliff swathed in moonlight. His gaze was riveted on a scene as strange as any he could have evoked from the pages of the *Thousand and One Nights*. In the center of a broad circle of silent Bakhtiari, stood Judy, the lights of the flickering fires falling on her face. Her eyes were following the movements of a solidly built man with a pumpkin-shaped head, who, coat off and sleeves rolled above the elbow, stood haranguing his audience con-

cerning the merits of an old-fashioned, muzzle-loading pistol that lay on his palm. Except for his surroundings, he might have been the conventional magician spell-binding his audience with the usual magician's patter. And Judy might have been his assistant, the pretty little lady that allows herself to be bound with a few miles of tape and sealed in the inviolable cabinet at the climax of the show. But the stage-setting and the audience had a certain quality that gave to the performance a grim and fantastic touch. The magician was plainly working with a little more than his usual professional zest, the audience was listening and watching a little too intently, and the eyes of the assisting lady were a little too strained and bright.

Savidge left his horse in the shadows at the lower end of the cliff and began to move towards the lighted circle. He had heard his coming announced from outpost to outpost. At any other time he would have been welcomed with acclaim, but now, as he joined

the outer ring of onlookers, only one or two turned to look at him. The majority of them were too much absorbed in the drama of the night to do more than lift their eyes for an instant to the new arrival's face. Then they turned again to their rapt scrutiny of the two figures in the center of the stage. On one man only did his appearance have any effect. As he passed into the radius of the firelight, a tall Arab lounging in the shadow of the cliff rose softly to his feet, his somber black eyes gleaming with a sudden excitement.

Savidge began to move unobtrusively around the circle until he reached a point not far from where Judy was standing. He then saw that between the magician and his assistant was a little heap of paraphernalia—the usual magician's accessories. The entertainment had evidently been going on for some time, and the audience had reached the point where they hung between scoffing derision and superstitious awe.

“So that's Jaggard,” Savidge thought.

"Well, he's got nerve and he's clever, but I'm afraid he's bucking against the wrong gang if he thinks he can get away from the Bakhtiari by magic, unless he's got a miracle up his sleeve."

But it would seem that Jaggard had no misgivings. He put one thumb in a trouser pocket, and leaned forward from the hips, the pistol held out to the scrutiny of his audience.

"O men of the Bakhtiari!" he said, grandiloquently, "what I have shown you is but child's play compared with the next number on the program. I am come but lately from sitting at the feet of the great lamas of Thibet. By certain deeds I acquired merit and favor in their eyes, and in return they bestowed upon me a marvelous gift. This gift, O men of the Bakhtiari, I shall deign to exhibit before your unworthy eyes, that you may learn what I am, and treat me as becomes my rank."

"So sounds the wind when it blows through the dry reeds!" sneered a voice from the outer circle. A pock-marked, fanatical, and alto-

gether unpleasant nomad stood staring skeptically over the shoulders of his companions. Jaggard disregarded the interruption serenely.

"This gift, O benighted children of the desert, is no other than the gift of invulnerability. Possessed of it as I am, no bullet can harm me. The best shot among you may shoot at me—but he cannot kill me!"

"Assuredly thou art a jinn or an afrit that thou canst do such a thing!" mocked the disgruntled skeptic from the outer circle.

Jaggard wheeled towards the voice sharply. "Nay, brother! Nor a ghoul nor a cat-headed man with horns and hoofs—such as thou art afraid of when alone after dark!"

A hoot of laughter greeted this remark, for Jaggard, hitting out at the superstitious traits of the Bakhtiari in general, had landed neatly on the well-known weakness of this particular member of their band. The man's face darkened angrily at the too intimate banter of his neighbors, and he moved away, muttering a "*Bismillah!*" to frighten off any demons that

might be lurking in the haunted demesne beyond the fire. As he flung himself angrily away from the circle he ran plump into the Arab that had been lounging in the shadow of the cliff.

“Gently, brother!” said the Arab.

“Thou art the servant of the *farangi!*” exclaimed the tribesman. “Tell him that I, Mohammed Ali, have sworn by the Blessed Prophet to kill him before the dawn!”

He disappeared into the darkness, muttering threats, and the tall Arab worked his way around the ring of swarthy spectators until he stood pressed close to the elbow of the teller of tales.

“Sahib?”

“Hassan!” The teller of tales did not move his head, and his voice was lower than a whisper. In the laughter that followed another of Jaggard’s sallies Hassan murmured the threat of Mohammed Ali.

“We must get away tonight,” said Savidge, scarcely moving his lips in shaping the words.

"Can you get the horses?"

"Yes, Sahib!"

"Have them ready at the lower end of the cliff, where the fire-altars are. Wait there."

"Till the Sahib comes. I understand."

"Good! Don't go yet. Wait your time. . . . By my eyes, O pupil of the lamas! it is a bullet!"

This remark was addressed to Jaggard, who stood before the teller of tales, holding a round black ball between his finger and thumb.

"Better examine it and make sure," urged the magician. "It might be a *div* [demon] in disguise, and carry you off!"

Again the tribesmen gave way to laughter, and Hassan took advantage of the diversion to slip away. A snake could not have wriggled through the grasses more noiselessly.

"May I be stung by a scorpion of Kashan if it be not as thou hast said—a bullet," repeated the teller of tales, after a grave and prolonged scrutiny of the object. "It is

such a one as I have seen many times at the Capital."

"Then, O traveler, take thy knife and mark the bullet, that thou mayst know it again."

The Bakhtiari crowded around Abd-al-Malik, the teller of tales, as he marked with his knife a cross on the bullet.

"It is done, worker of wonders," he said.

"Good! Now drop the bullet into the pistol, which thy neighbor has loaded with a double charge of powder. That's right. Here is a rod. Ram it down well so that the powder will kick. Thou art sure the bullet is in the gun, brother?"

"As I am a hadji and an honest man, the bullet is in the gun!"

"And thou, O benighted children of the desert, hast thou seen the gun loaded and the charge rammed down?"

The tribesmen made a hoarse sound of assent. There could be no doubt that the magician had the full attention of his audience. He swaggered across the firelit space

and flippantly took the old-fashioned pistol from a tribesman's hands. Unshaven, unwashed, his clothes begrimed with the dust and stains of travel, he was still Tom Jaggard at his best—suave, insolently serene, and entirely the master of the moment.

“Gad! I'm beginning to like you, Jaggard!” Savidge thought. “But you're in the tightest box I ever saw. What next?”

By this time Jaggard had stepped once more to the center of the stage. “O men of the Bakhtiari!” he cried, spinning the pistol around his amazing fingers, “I have a talisman more powerful than the knucklebone of the wolf or the eyeball of the weasel.” He held the pistol on the palm of his outstretched hand. “I defy the best shot among the Bakhtiari to kill me!”

A sharp murmur and movement of excitement ran among the audience, and Savidge heard his wife give a smothered gasp of fear. Jaggard, still keeping up his patter, stepped closer to Judy.

"Don't be scared, little girl!" Savidge heard him say. "I've got the bullet out of the pistol. They can shoot till morning and not hurt me. When I give the signal drop the handkerchief—you understand?"

He took from his pocket a red silk handkerchief and thrust it into her unwilling hands.

"Oh, don't risk it!" she whispered. "Isn't there some other way?"

"Got to risk it," Jaggard returned. "The trick will work, and they'll take me for Auramadzu, Junior! Remember, Persepolis is only six miles away. You want to get there, don't you?"

"Yes! But I can't let you risk your life!"

"Oh, cut out the worry, little girl! Keep your eyes on the Professor and drop the handkerchief when I say three!"

He stepped back again to the center of the ring of watching faces. Savidge edged his way into the front row. He stood now within six feet of Judy, who kept her eyes fixed desperately on Jaggard. He could see that she

was white to the lips, and the hand nearest him kept opening and closing nervously. Jaggard looked once at her, and then he repeated his challenge, twirling the pistol provocatively.

For a moment no one moved. Then out of the shadows swaggered the pock-marked tribesman, Mohammed Ali, pistol in hand. But before he had time to utter a word, the teller of tales sprang past Judy and strode into the center of the ring, exclaiming:

“I will kill you!”

He heard Judy give a little cry of terror behind him. “All right, Judy!” Jaggard sang out. Then he handed the pistol promptly to the teller of tales.

“So you want to kill me, my friend?”

Abd-al-Malik nodded gravely. “It is a good pistol. I will shoot at you and I will kill you, if your talisman does not work.”

“All right, brother! Aim straight at the heart. When the farangi woman drops the handkerchief, fire!”

Jaggard walked a few paces away and faced the teller of tales. Savidge aimed the pistol deliberately at the magician's breast.

"One!" Jaggard's resonant voice boomed through the night.

"Two!" He stood erect and folded his arms, with a mocking smile on his face. The teller of tales squinted along the barrel, which was as fixed as if jawed in a vise.

After an interval measurable by centuries, Jaggard called out "Three!" and the handkerchief fluttered from Judy's hand to the ground.

There was a flash, followed by an ear-splitting report. Judy closed her eyes tight and swayed like a flower in the wind. But there came a shout of guttural laughter, cries of "*Ba! Ba!*" and "*Ahi! Shahbash!*"

Her eyes opened in spite of herself. In front of her was the teller of tales, his lean face thrust forward, the smoking pistol in his hand; and a few paces away stood Jaggard, a black bullet nipped between his bared

teeth! The firelight fell on the round red face covered with a scraggly beard, on the lips stretched into an inhuman grin, on the bullet between the teeth—and he looked for all the world like a leering gargoyle. But as he stood there looking at Judy he did something that gargoyles never do—he slowly and solemnly winked his left eye.

Her taut nerves gave way. Softly but hysterically she began to laugh, even as the tears ran down her face.

Jaggard spat the bullet from his mouth and it fell to his feet. The teller of tales hastened forward and as he stooped to pick it up he said in a low voice: “I’m Savidge. If anything happens, make for the end of the cliff.” He walked over to one of the fires and gravely examined the bullet. Then he turned to the Bakhtiari.

“Assuredly the *farangi* is a worker of miracles!” he cried. “On my word as a hadji and an honest man, this is the very bullet!”

The tribesmen pressed about him. The

marked bullet flew from hand to hand. Undoubtedly it was the very one they had seen put into the pistol and rammed down. Their faces were full of superstitious awe; the whites of their eyes gleamed in the firelight. An odd thrill that was half fear and half wonder ran through the crowd. Some of them refused to touch the miraculous bullet, and there were many "*Bismillahs!*" muttered into wagging beards.

Jaggard's face was complacent, but his eyes were gleaming watchfully as he looked into the crowding faces. Mohammed Ali had strode into the firelight, a sneering smile on his pock-marked face. He held a pistol in his hand.

"Assuredly thou art a great magician to have done this thing," he began. "I, too, would test the Sahib's powers."

"Thy bullet could not touch me, brother," replied Jaggard, calmly.

"Thou needst have no fear, since thou hast a talisman to ward off bullets!"

“I have no fear, brother—for myself, but for another!”

“Then, in the name of the Blessed Prophet, I shall shoot!”

Jaggard held up a warning hand. “O foolish one! By the talisman I possess I can turn a bullet from its course and send it back into the body of him that shoots at me!”

There was a stir of wonder among the Bakh-tiari at this announcement. But Mohammed Ali, fearful though he might be of afrits and the unseen powers of darkness, had little belief in a *farangi* magician.

“The true believer cannot be harmed by a dog of a *farangi*!” he said, with dignity.

“Thou hast seen what a *farangi* can do?”

“I have seen the Sahib’s pistol and the Sahib’s bullet!”

“Was not the pistol fairly loaded with powder and the bullet rammed home?”

“Even so it appeared to the eyes, Sahib.”

“And did not the hadji shoot straight to the heart?”

“If it be that he is a hadji! Is it not said of the jackal that he dipped himself in indigo and thought he was the peacock?”

Abd-al-Malik, the teller of tales, sprang forward. “Dog of a Bakhtiari!” he snarled. “Son of a burnt father! Thou art a liar and the offspring of liars! May a curse fall upon thy house!”

Mohammed Ali jerked up his long-barreled pistol, but before he could finger the trigger, Savidge hit him fairly between the eyes. The tribesman fell like a log, but the body had not struck the ground before Jaggard dashed through the circle of bewildered Bakhtiari and disappeared into the night. Then there was a rush of feet, a babel of hoarse cries, and a scattering fire of musketry as the Bakhtiari followed in pursuit.

In thirty seconds the camp was deserted. There remained only the teller of tales and Judy, who stood as if rooted to the spot, straining her ears to catch the sounds of pursuit that grew fainter and fainter.

"Judy!" The teller of tales spoke under his breath.

She did not catch the word, but she met his eyes fully—the gray, un-Oriental eyes, with their shrewd, deep twinkle. As she looked into them they grew very tender—and she faltered towards him with outstretched hands.

A moment later they were running side by side through the dark towards the black bulk of the cliff. Behind them and to their left they could hear the sound of shooting and an occasional shout, as the angry tribe searched for the invulnerable pupil of the lamas. Jaggard had evidently led the chase away from the cliff, for when they reached the fire-altars, at the end of the cliff, Hassan alone stood by the horses. He led forward Judy's horse and Savidge swung her into the saddle. During their run through the dark they had not exchanged a word. From the instant when Judy recognized her husband and their hands met over the nomads' fire, there had been no word between them

after her first startled cry, except: "Are you all right, Judy?" and "Yes—yes! I'm all right!"

But now as he swung her up to the saddle she clung to him for an instant, and he heard her say: "Oh, I'm so glad—so glad!" And in the darkness she brushed his cheek with her lips.

It seemed to him that flowers must be growing somewhere near; the stars seemed to swing down in a radiance of white fire; and in that crowded instant John Savidge proved himself capable of the divine madness of the true lover. For with the sounds of pursuit growing louder, and the pounding of running feet coming nearer, he snatched his wife from the saddle, swung her down to his breast, and held her close, while he told her that he loved her, loved her; that she was dearer to him than anything else in all the wide world.

Then he put her back into the saddle and mounted his own horse. They sat with tightened rein, waiting. The noise of shouting

and running came nearer; they saw figures darting between them and the distant camp-fires, and in a moment Jaggard rounded the end of the cliff, running low, with the fleetest of his pursuers not more than a hundred yards behind him. He flung himself on the horse Hassan held for him, with a grim chuckle as he gasped:

“We’d better go while the going’s good! There’s about a million of ’em scouring the cliff!”

“Keep close to me,” Savidge said to Judy. “Never mind the reins—just hang on. Your horse will follow mine.”

In silence they streamed out across the plain. The wind whistled about their ears. The dry sand flew behind their horses’ hoofs; and they had not gone far when a bullet zinged uncomfortably close to Hassan’s head.

“They’ve taken horse, Sahib!” he called.

For half an hour the Bakhtiari followed; but the sound of pursuit grew gradually fainter; an hour before dawn the noises died

away entirely, and the horses were pulled down to a walk.

“They’ve given it up for the night,” Savidge said, “but they’ll be on the trail again in the morning. They would track a man for a week if they thought he had a dozen kran in his pockets.”

For a mile or two farther the jaded horses plodded along together. Then something squat and black glowed against the sky, and it was thus that Judy came upon the Lost City—under the magic of the moon and the stars. She saw it for the first time, vast, void, and still, just as Savidge had described it that day in the bronze cage on the mezzanine floor—the colossal flight of steps sweeping up to the great stone platform, the moonlight throwing fantastic shadows on the ruins of palaces and temples, the outlandish columns black against the stars. It lay in a welter of silence, the heavy, oppressive silence that falls upon the world just before the dawn—a city whose heart had ceased to beat centuries before.

By the time they reached the great stone stairway the fire had gone out of the stars, the moon had become weazened and gray, and a red glare shot up behind the hills that form the eastern bulwark of the Dead City. The dawn-wind was bitterly cold. They rode up the stone stairway, more than two hundred steps, with an angle so gentle that it was like riding up the slope of a low hill, and dismounted in the lee of a ruined temple.

Savidge wrapped Judy in his blankets and bade her wait while he and Hassan went at once to the place where he had left his survey-maps. Jaggard unsaddled the horses and found a sheltered spot for them; and Judy was left to herself. She sat huddled in a corner of a great ruined doorway of black basalt, carved with curious angular figures of beasts and men, and watched the desert and the gray ruins turn to an iridescent wonder under the rising sun. So this, at last, was the Lost City towards which her desires had run; this was the goal of adventure she had

dreamed of; this was a page from one of her own stories. And yet, all she could think of was John Savidge and his maps. He had disappeared between the forelegs of an enormous winged bull; all she could look at was this black aperture that had swallowed him up; and the one emotion she was susceptible of just then was fear of what she should see in his face when he came back. She knew she should be able to tell at once whether he had found the precious papers undisturbed, or gone.

“If they are lost,” she thought, “I shall want to die. It will be the worst moment of my life.”

So she sat with her eyes on the winged bull, blind to the enchantment of a gorgeous sunrise that was turning the Lost City to a city of gold. Jaggard passed her, foraging for something with which to make a breakfast fire, but she paid no heed to him. She sat motionless, until beyond the opening between the bull's legs she saw a movement. Then she rose to

her feet. Savidge came out into the daylight alone. He walked with his head a little bent, slowly, as if he was tired. The harsh sunlight brought out the crow's-feet about his eyes and the touches of gray on his temples.

She knew that they had lost, that the game was going against them; but in this moment the thing that hurt her was the drag of his feet, the tired droop of his shoulders. It seemed as if she realized for the first time how hard he had worked and fought, all his life. An exquisite sense of pity and tenderness was born in her heart. She began to walk quickly towards him, between the rows of ruined columns that had once been the palace of Xerxes.

When he saw her coming, he straightened his shoulders and smiled cheerfully. "Well, they're gone, Judy! Someone has been here—not longer ago than yesterday, by the signs."

She put out her hand and touched his breast. "Ah, my dear! my dear! It is my fault! I've lost you the game! I've—"

She turned away and hid her face against

a column, trying to control the quivering of her lips.

“Why, Judy! dear little girl! look here, you mustn’t blame yourself. It’s all in the game. The thing might have happened to me!”

“No—no!” she sobbed. “I was stupid! I’ve been a handicap to you! I’ve f-f-failed.”

With a swift lighting up of his whole face, he interrupted these self-reproaches in the only right and authentic way: he gathered her into his arms with authority and a great tenderness.

“Hush! Judy! You mustn’t say you’ve failed. Why, don’t you know, you silly little person, that I’m happier this minute with your head right there, than I’ve ever been in my life before? I’ve lost a set of maps down here, but I’ve found something worth more than all the maps in the world—you! If it had n’t been for the maps I might never have found you, Judy, little wife!”

A woman never really loves a man till she

has wept in his arms. For Judy the greatest love story in the world began at the moment when she could not find her handkerchief and had to wipe her eyes on a sleeve of the gray abba. The sun climbed higher and fell warm against the pillars of Xerxes's palace. Jaggard straightened up from a small fire among the stones of a neighboring ruin and surveyed with a tolerant grin two telltale shadows that had fallen for some time across the floor of the palace of Xerxes.

"Breakfast is now ready in the dining-car, last car to the rear!" he boomed. And the two shadows hastily kissed once more and came out from behind the pillar, hand in hand.

CHAPTER XIV

"I WAS A KING IN BABYLON"

THEY had breakfast among the ruins of the Palace of Xerxes, among fragments of fluted columns and tumble-down doorways through which the envoys of tributary nations once marched in gorgeous procession, bearing gifts to the great king; among sculptured panels and slabs that had taken an army to hoist into position; among shattered friezes and tablets strewn about the stylobate whereon the "king of kings" reared his mansion of marble and stone. On every hand were ruin and decay. Ravens croaked in the deserted palaces, and a kite poised over the City that Was. They sat on a stone tablet carved with a cuneiform inscription, and ate their meal of *sandjiak* and tea above a legend that ran: "I am Xerxes, the Great King, the King

of Kings, King of the Nations with their many peoples, King of this great earth, even to afar!"

"People are like frogs in a puddle," observed Jaggard; "you can catch 'em and throw 'em back and catch 'em again. Old Xerxes used to sit on his peacock throne and hook 'em; and now the Czar's got out his little rod and line. You'd think they would get tired of it, but they keep on nibbling at the bait."

Savidge nodded absently. He was going over in his mind their position and his chances of recovering the stolen maps. He was the only one of the party that had either food or arms. In their flight from the Bakhtiari, everything Judy and her escort possessed had been left behind. There was food enough to last the four of them a day, with economy. The question of rations was not serious, for six miles to the south of them was a tiny *chapar-khanah*; but there was another aspect to the situation that was not so cheerful. With the brightening of the dawn a wind had risen.

It was now swooping up from the south in spirals of sand, and it had completely obliterated every mark by which they might trace Wolkonsky in his flight from the Lost City.

"Couldn't we start on and trust to luck to hit his trail?" Judy asked.

Savidge shook his head. "The horses need rest. We might be able to travel for another twelve hours, but the horses couldn't, without rest. And do you see those sand-devils? The whole surface of the plain of Mervdasht has shifted over-night. The keenest Siberian bloodhound couldn't nose a trail a yard away from the Grand Staircase. You see we don't know which way Wolkonsky's headed. He may have gone north to Isfahan or south to Shiraz, intending to work around by the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. He may have gone straight east, intending to make Teheran by the way of Yedz, or he may have gone west to Bushire. It's a pretty big country, you see; and a chap can drop out of sight a lot easier than at home, where the telephone

or telegraph can pick him up almost anywhere."

"Then what can we do?" she cried.

Savidge looked with a smile at the little figure perched on the carved tablet of Xerxes. Dusty, sunburnt, in a flannel shirt, with her hair in a heavy schoolgirl braid, and a faded silk handkerchief knotted about her throat, she had never looked so pretty to him. For in spite of the fatigue and lack of sleep, she was dauntlessly ready to go anywhere and do anything that he said. She was very tired, but there was a valiant spirit in every line of her.

"We'll take it easy during the heat of the day," he replied. "Late in the afternoon we'll start for Shiraz. There we can get into communication with Gholam Rezah or Nadir Shah. They'll find out quickly enough where Wolkonsky is, and then we can set out on his trail."

"Couldn't you appeal to the American Minister at Teheran?"

Savidge laughed his mirthless laugh. "My

dear girl, the American Minister at Teheran is about as important as the secretary of a Chamber of Commerce. The real power in Persia is the Russian Minister. No; all we can do just now is to trust to the men of the Cause. If Wolkonsky gets to Teheran first, there'll be about as much show of getting those maps back as there is of getting ice-cream cones over there in the Hall of a Hundred Columns!"

Judy wrung her hands together. "John! There's something else—what became of those papers you were carrying from the Eastern Securities Company? Has he got those, too?"

"He has those, too!"

Judy made a gesture of utter despair. "Then we've lost the whole game! The maps are gone, and he knows the amount of the Company's bid—everything!"

Savidge's eyes began to twinkle. He looked at her with a boyish and irresponsible grin. "You know, Judy," he drawled, "I've a

sneaking idea Wolkonsky doesn't know he's carrying the Company's papers!"

"John!" she gasped, and backed away from him as if she thought he was losing his mind. "What *do* you mean?"

But he refused to answer. He only laughed and put his arm about her shoulders. "Come along, and let's forget the whole blame thing for an hour. Let's pretend we're tourists doing Persepolis. I'll be the special conductor and you'll be the tourist; come along!"

She saw that he wanted to forget for a time the task that lay ahead of him, and she threw herself into his mood. While Jaggard took watchman's duties, and Hassan watered the horses in a tiny stream that ran at the foot of the hills back of Persepolis, she wandered with her husband through the silent squares and ruined palaces of the Lost City. To Judy it was not a "city" at all, but merely a gigantic platform of hewn stone, stippled with splintered blocks and shattered columns, with huge plinths falling into dust, and walls rent with

great cracks; with ruined archways standing gap-toothed to the winds, and battered sculpture representing the gods and the puissant kings of ancient Iran. But to Savidge the Lost City meant a great deal more. He Bae-dekered her through the silent streets and reconstructed the city before her eyes with the enthusiasm of the savant. This was his hobby—quarrying in the ruins of ancient civilizations; and down in his heart of hearts John Savidge was prouder of his monograph on Persepolis, which was read before the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists, than of his record as a builder of railways and bridges.

He kindled to his subject as he saw Judy's eyes glow, her cheeks flush. A raven, perched on a broken column, croaked his displeasure when they invaded the Palace of Darius, which stands on the highest part of the platform. Pigeons cooed in the ruined temple where two-score years previously the explorer Stanley had carved his name high on a broken pillar. He rebuilt for her the gorgeous Pal-

ace of Xerxes, deciphering the inscribed tablets and friezes. He fascinated her with his description of the Hall of a Hundred Columns, as it stood when Darius held there his ceremonies of state. Kicking aside a mass of rubble and débris, the detritus of centuries, he disclosed a chunk of carbonized cedar.

“More than two thousand years ago this piece of wood was part of a wonderful ceiling, a ceiling of cedar, carved and chiseled and polished, inlaid with gold and silver and ivory, studded with topazes and rubies and with turquoises from the mines of Nishapur. This ceiling had a thousand beams, and they were supported by pillars hewn out of solid rock. Can you see it?—the friezes ornamented with scrolls and soffits of gold; the walls hung with the most gorgeous tapestries from the looms of Khorasan; and the dadoes of hammered brass? Sometimes, when I had been working down here for weeks, I used to believe I could see the place as it looked in its

great days, rising out of the plain here, with the sun flashing on its temples and palaces!"

"Why! did you live here," she asked, wonderingly, "and how long?"

"Months, off and on. I worked up most of my plans here. It was the safest place I could find. They took me for an unusually batty archæologist, and let me alone. You remember I told you about the underground chambers and the mile or two of passageways? I was practically the first to discover them. Of course, others had known about them, but none of the later explorers had them on their maps. I poked around and found the stairway that led to them, and down there I worked. Maybe there'll be time to go down there before we leave, but now you must get some sleep. Jove! what a wind!"

They stepped out from a huge block of stone that had sheltered them, and gasped in the sudden and unexpected gale. A dusky cloud of desert sand swirled across the Lost

City, blotting out the sun and filling Judy's hair and eyes with grit.

"I thought so," muttered Savidge; "we're in for a regular sand blizzard—about the worst thing that can happen down here. It may keep up for two or three days, and—and I haven't a thing to smoke!"

By the time they rejoined Jaggard among the ruins of the Palace of Xerxes, the wind was so strong it was all Judy could do to stand up against it. She noticed that already the sand had drifted inches deep on the north side of each fallen column and block of stone, and lay ribbed across the stone floor of the plateau. The air was a maelstrom of whirling sand, blotting out the landscape. Behind the dusky cloud the sun was nothing but a sickly yellow blur. The sand-laden wind swirled over the city with a long-drawn-out, swishing noise like the sound of huge-girthed rollers breaking on a level shore.

They could just make out the figure of Hassan fighting his way towards them through

the storm. He had picketed the horses in the hills back of the city; Jaggard was gathering up blankets and saddles that were fast being drifted under the sand, and placing them in a sheltered place behind the mound in the center of the plateau.

"Keep together!" Savidge had to raise his voice in order to be heard above the hulla-baloo of the wind. He untied the pugaree from Judy's helmet and swathed it about the upper part of her face. "We won't be able to stand it up here in a minute!" he shouted. "Follow me!"

They closed up and picked their way slowly and painfully across the great stylobate, Savidge leading and Hassan bringing up the rear with some blankets. They could not see a half dozen feet ahead of them, and Jaggard and Judy had to rely wholly upon Savidge's intimate knowledge of the ground. The wind whistled about their ears, the sand pelted them, and their clothes looked as if they had been through a flour mill. After what seemed

to Judy hours of blind groping, they stopped in front of a huge block of stone, against which the sand splashed like waves against a breakwater. Above them, through the yellow blur, Judy could make out the vague leer of the great winged bull. Savidge stooped down and slipped between the forelegs of the beast. Judy followed and found herself in darkness that reverberated with the sound of his voice.

“Don’t move! We’re at the head of a steep flight of stairs. Wait till I light a match!”

In the brief flare of the match he found her hand and guided her to the first step of the stairs. Then the match went out, and they descended through abysmal darkness. It seemed to Judy they went down a thousand steps, more or less, into the very bowels of the earth.

“Now stand still where you are,” said Savidge’s voice. He struck a second match, and they could see him fumbling at the wall near the foot of the stairs. Plunging his arm in to the elbow, he brought out a handful of

candles. When he had given each of them one, he led the way down a short passage to what appeared to be an enormous hall, or crypt, with two rows of huge pillars springing upward into the darkness. Their four will-o'-the-wisp lights made little golden patches of radiance in the velvet blackness; their voices echoed uncannily when they spoke to one another.

Judy noticed that one of the walls at the end of the chamber was perforated with window-like openings.

"We're directly under the porch of Xerxes, at the head of the Great Stairway," Savidge explained. "Those openings lead to channels that used to connect with the cistern overhead. That cistern had a capacity of several million gallons of water, and I've a theory that when too many of his enemies got dangerous, Darius used to put them in this room, close the doors, and turn the water on. There's no other way to account for the channels, and I shouldn't put it past those old kings!"

"Pleasant chaps!" muttered Jaggard. He was, as usual, serenely ready for anything. He and Savidge had been sizing each other up since daylight, in furtive man-fashion, and each had come to the conclusion that the other would be a very good backer in a fight. There had been small opportunity for conversation between them; but Judy had told her husband of Jaggard's championing her cause, and Savidge had expressed his gratitude briefly, with perhaps the slightest twinge of jealousy in his heart that another man should have been the one to share Judy's first adventures.

"Is the stairway we came down the only way out of here?" Jaggard asked, coming back from a stroll around the crypt. "There's another passageway opening off the end of this room."

"That's the second way out," answered Savidge. "It comes up in the propylæum of the Hall of a Hundred Columns. There may have been a way out, in Darius's day, through the cistern, but now the channels are choked

with sand and the débris of centuries. There are two stairways only that I know of—and I flatter myself I know Persepolis underground as no other man alive knows it."

Jaggard took his candle and went off on an exploring trip of his own, after Savidge had cautioned him against losing himself in the maze of passageways; Hassan composed himself, Oriental fashion, on his heels near the stairway, and went to sleep. Savidge folded a blanket on the stone floor in front of one of the huge pillars and bade Judy try to get a little sleep.

The air in the great chamber was fresh, and the place had not a vestige of dampness, owing to the elaborate system of air-passages running in from under the Great Stairway and the Porch of Xerxes. But the darkness was complete, except where their candles pricked the gloom; and when they spoke aloud their voices echoed so hollowly that they fell to speaking in low tones, as if afraid of disturbing the ghosts of hapless men and women

that had come to their end in this forgotten chamber.

Judy sat down obediently on the blankets, but her eyes were very wide and bright. "I don't think I can sleep," she said. "It's the spookiest place I've ever seen. Would you — would you mind sitting down? I'm not scared, you know, but I'd feel more comfortable if you sat down. There's plenty of room on these blankets."

Savidge needed no second invitation. He dropped down beside her, and to make quite sure she was not afraid, he put his arm around her, and she leaned her cheek quite naturally against his shoulder. And they talked. Their theme was older than the Lost City itself. It was born when the world was born, and it will be young when the ashes of the world go sifting down the Milky Way. Doubtless other couples had sat in that fatal crypt and seen a radiance in the darkness; but Judy and John Savidge took no account of them. They were wrapt in contemplation of their own singular

case; and they told each other the things that lovers have recounted since the world was born—how and when and where it all began.

Gradually they worked down to the present, from those incredible days when he had been the Man from Bagdad, and she was The Little Girl in the Cage. They confessed to each other those weaknesses that become adorable in the person one loves. She admitted being afraid of the dark, and he confessed to a romantic imagination that no Board of Directors ever would have suspected.

"What I loved in you first, Judy, was your way of looking as if you actually saw the things I described to you. I wouldn't have admitted it to you then, but I'm just as keen about picturing out things as you are. Do you know, I can shut my eyes and see that railroad we're going to build across this sleeping land! I can see the construction gangs stringing out across the plains, and the bridge-builders with their cranes and spile-piers, and the supply trains creeping after!"

"I know—I know!" she whispered.

"It's God's own gift—the talent to dream. That's one reason why I could work down here all those months and keep from going crazy with the loneliness of the place. To me it never was a Dead City. I built it up all over again. Sometimes I used to have a queer feeling that I've been here before—ages and ages ago, you know. I suppose that sounds like rot, doesn't it? In the States, in the great cities of the world, I shouldn't dare even to think of such a thing. But here—well, here it's different. Anything is possible here, in these old ruins, among the scowling faces of all these outlandish gods and men, among these tombs of world-old warriors and kings. Many a night, Judy, I've lain up there in the Palace of Xerxes, looking up through the shattered columns at the stars, and fancying that the world had rolled back two thousand years—the knightly years, as Henley calls them—and that I was a king in Babylon, and all the monarchs of the tributary nations marched

humbly before me, bearing gifts! And as I lay there under the stars, I could hear the thunder of my warriors clattering up the great stone staircase, with the heads of my enemies on their saddle-bows, and —"

Savidge's voice was blotted out by a rumble like that of heavy artillery racketing over a stony pavement. Judy clutched her husband's arm and the pair looked at each other with questioning eyes. The rumble grew louder and louder, rolled over their heads, and then died away as suddenly as it came, leaving a silence so thick and heavy it seemed to soak up the very sound of their breathing.

"Your dream — coming true!" she gasped.

"That's horsemen riding up the stone stairway!" Savidge cried, springing to his feet.

"The Bakhtiari!" she whispered.

"No, I don't believe it. They're too superstitious to come into the city."

"Then who?"

"That's what I'm going to find out!"

Jaggard's candle could be seen bobbing

towards them from the depths of a remote passageway, like the ghost of a lonely firefly; and Hassan came striding across the chamber with a question in his face. Savidge took from under a fold of his abba a brace of automatic pistols. One he gave to Jaggard and the other to Hassan.

“Likely enough it’s some caravaners driven in by the storm,” Savidge continued; “but we can’t afford to take any chances. I’m going up there to see—no, there’s no danger, Judy! I know where they are, and even if they discover our horses, they won’t know where we are. Stay over there in the center of the chamber and keep your candle lighted. Hassan, guard the bottom of the stairs there, and Jaggard, will you watch the second passageway? When I’m coming back, I’ll give an owl’s hoot—one. If I give two, put out your lights at once and wait for me over there at the entrance to the second passage, where Jaggard will be. Understand?”

They nodded assent, and Savidge crept si-

lently up the stairs and disappeared into the darkness above. How long they waited there in the gloom, none of them knew. They lost all track of time. And none of them spoke. Hassan, always silent and somber, was rooted at the foot of the stairs, his dark face as impassive and inscrutable as ever. Jaggard, too, was silent. Judy, from her pillar, could see his candle at the other end of the room, a tiny point of light in the immensity of the place. She held her own candle in her hand. Its light struck upward on her white face and disheveled hair. Her eyes were enormous and dark with suspense, and she leaned forward a little, straining her ears to catch the sound of Savidge's voice or his returning footsteps.

After an interminable wait, her ears, grown acute by reason of the strain upon her nerves, caught a faint scratching sound on the stairs. She saw Hassan cock the pistol, and in the same instant there came down through the gloom the faint cry of an owl. It was instantly

followed by another. Hassan snatched up his candle and sprang towards her. As he clutched her arm he blew out both candles.

"Quick, Memsahib!" He drew her silently and swiftly across the chamber to where Jaggard was standing in the passageway. In less than a minute they heard the sound of feet feeling their way over the stone floor, and Savidge joined them. When he spoke, his voice was exultant.

"It's Wolkonsky and a woman!" he said.

"Miss Arlundsen!" whispered Judy.

Savidge spoke a few quick words to Hassan in the vernacular, and they heard the Arab's sandaled feet padding softly down the second passageway.

"They were driven back by the storm," Savidge explained. "There are two natives with them, and they're all coming down here."

"Good!" cried Jaggard. "We can fight it out here, man to man."

"Not yet," replied Savidge. "We're even as far as numbers go; but you forget that

we can muster only two pistols between us. They've got rifles and revolvers. We'll have to try strategy first. . . . Listen!"

Voices could be heard coming nearer down the first stairway.

"We haven't any time to lose," Savidge added. "I'll go ahead. Follow me close."

He picked up Judy's blankets and gave them to Jaggard, taking the automatic pistol himself. Silently the three groped their way through the long dark passage, their hands slipping along the smooth-faced wall. After several turnings, Savidge lit a candle, and they found themselves blinking in a large chamber similar to the one they had left. Savidge pointed to a flight of stone steps in one corner.

"That's the second way out. Hassan is above by this time, guarding the other way—the one we came down. We've got Wolkon-sky trapped underground!"

"Nailed up right and tight!" Jaggard chuckled.

"And the best part of it is he doesn't know

we're here!" said Judy. Her eyes were sparkling with excitement.

"He knows by this time." Savidge smiled at her puzzled expression. "It wouldn't take long for a chap like Wolkonsky to guess what became of those candles. We'd better get up above before he catches us here."

At the top of the stairs a narrow shaft of light located for them the entrance into the open air. Savidge looked out cautiously, and then slipped through the narrow opening. They were standing under a propylæum in front of the ruins of the Hall of a Hundred Columns. Across the open court they could see the pair of winged bulls, near one of which stood Hassan, his head bent as if he was listening, the pistol held cocked in his hand. The storm had somewhat abated, although the air was still full of a light swirl of sand.

"Jaggard, suppose you take Mrs. Savidge over there to a sheltered spot and make her comfortable. She ought to get a little rest. It may be hours before they attempt to come up

from down there. I'll stand guard here." And aside, to Jaggard, he added: "Take her out of range."

Judy opened her mouth to protest, but before a word got out they heard Hassan's voice exclaim harshly in the vernacular. Then there came the sound of a revolver shot across the stone plateau, followed immediately by the long, shattering report of an automatic.

"They're rushing Hassan!" Savidge exclaimed. "Judy, keep under cover. Guard this entrance, Jaggard!"

And he started running through the sand-laden air towards the smoke-puffs that curled about the legs of the great stone beast that guarded the first entrance to the underground city.

CHAPTER XV

AT THE JOURNEY'S END

FOR one tense moment Judy stood with her heart pounding in her throat. Then there swept over her the realization that Savidge was in danger. She forgot everything else; forgot that she was a quiet and eminently sensible young woman in whose life battle, murder, and sudden death had played no more stirring part than is vouchsafed by a virile imagination; forgot that she was a part of the highly intensified and complicated civilization of the twentieth century—forgot everything, in fact, except that she was a woman and must be fighting with her man. In that moment she sloughed the factitious culture of the centuries and became the primitive woman, akin to the woman of the cave that trudged shoulder to shoulder with her man and took her part in the houghing.

Through the light swirl of the sand she saw three men at the feet of the winged bull—Hassan and two others that had thrown themselves out upon him from the narrow doorway. Then there came a fusillade of shots and the smoke blotted out the combatants. She ran toward them with a bird-like sensation of lightness and swiftness, oblivious to the crashing of the automatics, absolutely for the moment without fear. Just as she came near enough to make out their figures through the smoke and flying sand, she saw Hassan stagger backward and fall with a flinging up of one arm, and Savidge spring towards him, his pistol leveled at the opening to the underground passage. Only one of the attacking party was visible, and he had retreated to the doorway. Judy darted upon the automatic that Hassan had dropped; and she had time even in that crowded instant to think gratefully of Jaggard, who had taught her to use a pistol with some effect during the long ride to Tabriz.

When she straightened up from the ground, Savidge was standing close to the side of the entrance to the underground stairway. His face was set and his eyes had in them the glint of cold steel. At his feet the blood was trickling in a thin thread from a wound in Hassan's head. Judy kept her eyes averted from that sinister line of crimson and gripped her pistol. After a long minute of listening, Savidge looked around at her, saw her white, exalted face and the pistol gripped in her hand.

"Good girl!" he smiled at her.

"Is Hassan dead?" she whispered.

Savidge shook his head. "Only a scalp wound, I think. I want you to stand here and listen for any sound from the stairway. They've retreated with one man wounded, but they'll probably rush the second entrance over there as soon as they get their second wind. I'll stand guard there and send Jaggard over here to fix up Hassan. Keep away from the opening."

He bent for an instant over Hassan, then he patted her on the shoulder. "Good girl!" he said again, and hastened across the ruined city to the propylæum in front of the Hall of One Hundred Columns. The soldier that receives a decoration from the hands of his general for gallantry on the field of battle could not feel prouder than Judy felt over that touch on her shoulder and those two simple words of praise. It established a new bond between them; for after all is said and done, the highest expression of love between a man and a woman is experienced only by those that have fronted a great danger together and looked unflinchingly into the eyes of death.

Pistol in hand, she took up her post beside the forelegs of the great stone bull. In a moment Jaggard appeared, bound up Hassan's head, and proceeded to half carry, half drag him to the shelter of the ruins where they had eaten their breakfast. He then went to the hills back of the city for water to bathe the wound.

The wind went down, the air cleared, and the sun shone out scorching bright from a turquoise sky. About a hundred yards away across the ruins that strewn the plateau Judy could see her husband leaning against a pillar, his pistol in hand, alertly waiting. A burning, oppressive quiet settled over the Lost City; the horses, picketed not far away among the ruins of Xerxes's Palace, stood quiet, with drooping heads; a kite hung for a moment high up against the brazen blue of the sky, and then sailed away with a languorous movement of its wings. Savidge waved to her to sit down; and she sank back in the shadow cast by the great wings of the bull.

It was not much past the middle of the afternoon, but it seemed to her that days had passed since they first sighted the Lost City looming up through the dawn. She sat on her heels, the automatic clutched in her hand, her ears straining for sounds of movement beyond the narrow opening. She and Savidge

were too far apart for conversation, but she could watch his every movement, and she kept her eyes fixed on him, dreading the sound of the first shot that should announce Wolkon-sky's second attempt to get out of the trap in which he found himself. But no sound broke the stillness of the afternoon heat. Jaggard came back with water and finished his dressing of Hassan's wound. Then he made tea and brought her a cup, with a generous piece of *sandjiak* and some date paste. She ate and drank eagerly, unaware that the two men had gone on half rations that she might have enough. It was decided, upon her insistence, that Savidge, who had not slept for two nights, should be relieved by Jaggard and get two hours' rest. Hassan had recovered consciousness, and Jaggard believed he should be up and around in a few hours. The important thing was that Savidge should be in good form for the night's events, whatever they were to be, and somewhat reluctantly he gave

up his post to Jaggard. Bringing his blanket over to where Judy sat, he stretched out in the shade of the winged bull.

"I hate to sleep and leave you on guard, Judy," he said. "Are you sure you can stand it, girl?"

"I never felt more wide awake in my life! I'm equal to anything. I only wish they would come up," she cried, her eyes very big and bright.

Savidge laughed drowsily. "Good little Judy! Didn't I say she would make a good soldier!—"

His voice trailed off to silence and he was asleep before the sentence was finished.

Judy laid the pistol on her knees and sat with her chin in her hands. Many curious and undreamed-of thoughts went through her mind. Very close to the surface of every normal woman sleeps that other woman that has not forgotten the cave days. In Judy the cave-woman had awakened. As she sat there watching over her sleeping man, listening for

the sound of his enemies' approach, she was as old as the sun-bitten stones themselves. Something elemental and eternal awoke in her, a new look brooded in her eyes. When the sun dropped lower and shone hot upon him, she moved so that she could still shade him from its rays; and a sweet, deep expression came into her face.

The sun had gone down and the sudden twilight was creeping like a blue spirit through the ruins of the city, and the jackals were beginning to tune up for their evening concert, when Savidge awoke.

"Well, girl, how goes it?" he asked, as he stretched his arms.

"All quiet along the Polvar! Haven't heard so much as a whisper all the afternoon."

"Which means they're brewing something for tonight," he said. "You must have something to eat, if there's anything left, and turn in for a good long rest."

"I've been thinking. Can't I keep guard with you tonight?"

He looked at her tenderly and shook his head.

"Please, John," she pleaded; "I want to be with you if—if anything should happen."

He took her face between his two hands, looked down into her eyes as if he would find the soul in their liquid depths, and kissed her full upon the lips. "You must sleep tonight." The solicitude in his voice was very sweet to her. "You must get all the rest you can. We may have to get away any moment, and you must be ready to ride long and hard."

"But you may be in danger!"

Savidge gave her slender shoulders a little shake. "Don't worry your little head about me! I've got the whip-hand of our friend, and he knows it! He got all he wanted this morning, and I reckon he'll be mighty careful the next move he makes."

"But he won't stay down there like a rat in a trap!"

"And starve? I guess not! He'll either

try to fight his way out, or work some sort of trick."

"He may surrender."

Savidge shook his head.

"Wolkonsky's not one of the surrendering kind. No, he'll fight it out, unless — unless —"

"Unless what?" Judy looked up quickly. She saw that he was debating some question with himself.

"Oh, I just happened to think of the woman, Miss Arlundsen," he said, with an attempt at lightness that did not deceive her. "Her being down there sort of complicates matters for Wolkonsky."

Judy flushed to her temples. "And my being up here complicates matters for you — is that what you mean? "

"Yes," he answered honestly, "it does. If you were not here — Oh! my dear, my dear, don't misunderstand me!" He took her face again between his hands and kissed the eyes that looked wistfully into his own. "Don't

you see how it is, Judy? It is because I love you so, it's because you have become so precious to me that I'm afraid—yes, afraid! That's the only word for it. I've lived so many centuries without you that if anything should happen to you now, it would mean the end for me."

She leaned closer to him and pressed her cheek softly against his shoulder; and thus they stood for a moment, thinking of many things. At last she moved with a sigh and slipped her arm about his neck.

"You're a man," she said slowly, "and must do your work. Whatever happens, you must do your work. You are not made for little things, John, dear. Oh, I know more about you than you dream. Hassan has told me, and Jaggard. Your bravery is a word in the East." She drew his head down to hers. "I love you, dear, because you are a man."

"And I love you," he whispered, "because you are a woman—the bravest and the most glorious woman in all the world, and—"

"The happiest, dear," she said.

From the tangle of ruins at the other end of the stone plateau came a succession of weird cries. Judy started and shrank closer to her husband.

"It's nothing," Savidge answered her. "It's only the owls waking up. They'll keep that up all night, and the jackals will answer them from out there on the plain. So, you see, I won't be lonesome."

"I wish I could stay with you," she urged in reply.

"So do I, dear, but you must get some sleep. Stay here a minute while I go see how Hassan is coming on, and get a bite for you to eat."

When he came back he brought water and a small piece of *sandjiak*—the last in the saddle-bags. She refused to touch it until he had consented to take a mouthful; and they ate this very inadequate meal sitting on the same block of stone, while the moon came up magnificently to turn the Lost City into a silver miracle. Across the plateau they could see

Jaggard at his post, entirely comfortable and quite at home.

"I like your friend, Judy," Savidge said. "He stands four-square to the winds, and doesn't scare worth a cent."

Judy looked pleased. "I knew you would like him, for he, too, is a man. I never could have got down here without Jaggard."

"I know, I know. He's done me a service that I can never repay. Just the same, Judy, I confess—I don't mind telling you now—I was a little jealous of your Mr. Jaggard."

Judy laughed. "Jealous? Tom Jaggard is not the kind of man that falls in love with every woman he meets. He's not a woman's man. He has treated me as if I were his sister. He's not the kind to settle down by his own fireside. Wives, he puts it, are excess baggage."

"Excess baggage!" Savidge repeated, "yes, some wives would be exactly that."

She looked up at him with wistful, sea-green eyes, and he read the question in them.

"Not you, Judy," he said. "You're just what I said you would be, that day in the mezzanine balcony: You're the kind that will always play the game, and play it like a soldier."

Her face flushed and her eyes glowed with happiness. "I don't ask for anything but the chance to play it with you, John. Wherever you go, whatever chances you have to take, I want to be with you if I'm fit."

"You're fit," he nodded, with a touch of grimness in his face. "I don't know how we're coming out of this situation, exactly. They've got the arms and I've got the position, and neither of us has any food. But sooner or later I believe I am going to win this game. And I'd rather have you to help me, Judy, than any man I have ever known."

High up in a broken column an owl hooted and a jackal answered from out the great spaces of the night.

"You must turn in now, Judy," Savidge said. "I've fixed your blankets over there in

the Palace of Xerxes, and Hassan will be there to guard you. You won't be afraid, will you, girl?"

"I won't be afraid with you over here," she answered. "I should never be afraid anywhere with you."

She stood up and looked at him for a moment earnestly. "If I were not here, nothing could make you go away and lose your chance at Wolkonsky—not even starvation. Isn't that so?"

Savidge nodded his head slowly.

"Well, nothing on earth can make me give up, either—not even starvation. We'll fight it out together, John, as we'll fight everything together, to the end."

Savidge put his hand on her shoulder and looked at her indomitable little face, at her sensitive mouth, and her steady eyes.

"Always together, Judy," he said softly, "to the end."

The moon was high above the fragmentary

hills back of the city, and the stars were wheeling down the track of night, when Judy drew the blankets over her and lay down. She had never felt less like sleep, except that first night in the *bala-khanah* at Akstafa. She thought of that night now, and of how lonely she had been among all those strange figures and bizarre surroundings, and how she had missed John Savidge that first night of their separation. And then her thoughts wandered down the long trail to Tabriz, to Isfahan, to that unreal performance of magic in the shadow of the rock tombs of the Achæmenian kings. She lived again that wonderful, tremulous moment of recognition, the rush for the horses, the pursuit of the Bakhtiari. Her nerves quivered, her heart pounded, the blood rioted through her body as she felt again the mad embrace, the wild kiss in that quixotic instant before John Savidge swung her into the saddle and they spurred away from the pursuing tribesmen.

She could not sleep; the blankets seemed

to stifle her. She threw them aside and stood up. A shadowy figure, the head swathed in white, rose up from beside a broken column.

"Is it you, Memsahib?" a voice inquired.

"Yes, Hassan." The Arab squatted down again by the column.

Judy drew a long breath and looked over the sleeping city. The moonlight threw fantastic shadows over the ruins. An owl perched near by hooted at her querulously, and from across the plain came the melancholy howling of jackals. Across the stone plateau the black bulk of the winged bulls loomed between her and the horizon, and she knew that Savidge was standing in their shadow, waiting, watching, as unafraid and untiring as the granite beasts themselves. She touched her lips with her fingers and blew a kiss to him.

"Good-night, John, dear," she said, very softly.

Then she cuddled down in her blankets and paid no more attention to the hooting owls or the dolorous voices of the wawi. The

hundred and one voices of the night dropped half-toned on her ear and she fell asleep.

The sun was high in the sky of flawless turquoise when she awoke. For a moment she lay blinking her eyes, trying to think where she was or what had happened. Then she started to her feet with a feeling that she had missed the performance of some duty. She ran around the corner of the ruined wall and looked at once for Savidge. He was sitting beside the winged bull, pistol in hand, just as she had left him the night before. He waved to her a greeting, and she put the tips of her fingers to her lips. Hassan, she saw, was guarding the second underground entrance, and Jaggard was nowhere in sight. It did not take Judy long to do her toilet. She arranged her hair as well as she could without a mirror, indulged in a dry wash, and brushed the sand from her clothes.

Savidge met her with a smiling face. There had been no trouble during the night, he told her. The enemy had not even ventured up-

stairs. He had solved the food question by sending Jaggard to a *chapar-khanah* a half dozen miles away across the Plain of Merv-dasht. He had started shortly after daybreak, and if nothing unforeseen occurred, he should be back in time to prepare the noonday meal.

"Sorry, Judy," Savidge said, "but I've nothing to offer you for breakfast but water. Do you think you can stand it till noon?"

She assured him she was as fit as a fiddle. The water bottle was brought out from the cool shade of the stone foundation on which the winged bulls stood, and Judy took a long draught. Her night's sleep had rested her, and she looked fresh and young and ready for anything. Savidge, on the other hand, was haggard with the night's vigil. She was trying to induce him to let her take over the guard duty while he slept for an hour or two, when he held up one hand for silence, and she saw his fingers tighten over the butt of the pistol as he tiptoed forward a pace.

She listened intently, and to her ears there

came a faint sound as of something metallic being drawn across the stone floor below. Savidge motioned her back, and she crouched against the side of the great bull, every nerve in her body quivering in sudden excitement. The noise came nearer and stopped. Then the long black barrel of a rifle was thrust out between the forelegs of the winged bull. Tied to the end of the barrel was a white handkerchief. The besieged were offering a flag of truce.

"Come out!" called Savidge.

The rifle was pushed out onto the platform, and was followed at once by Wolkonsky, as smiling and debonair as if he had been making a morning call. He saluted Savidge, who holstered his pistol as soon as he recognized the Chief.

"I didn't know you at first in that make-up," Wolkonsky said, pleasantly. . . . "Ah, Madame Savidge. This is a pleasure."

He doffed his helmet and bowed with grave courtesy. Then he turned to Savidge. "I

am glad Madame is here; it makes my task easier. For myself and my men, I ask no quarter; but one cannot make war on women — is it not so, Monsieur Savidge?"

Savidge nodded his head, and waited.

"It is for Mademoiselle Arlundsen that I ask your favor. She is not well. She is in need of food and water, and — well, we have neither." He shrugged his shoulders. "For myself, it is all in the game."

"Quite so," said Savidge, brusquely. "Miss Arlundsen is at liberty to come out and share our food."

Wolkonsky raised his hand in the military salute. "I thank you, Monsieur; and I give you my word that while Mademoiselle Arlundsen is with you we shall make no attack."

"I accept the pledge," replied Savidge, returning the salute.

"I have one more favor to ask," Wolkonsky added. "Our horses —"

"They have been watered and fed."

Wolkonsky smiled. "You are a generous enemy, Monsieur Savidge."

He bowed again to Judy, and disappeared between the forelegs of the winged bull. Savidge looked at Judy and smiled. "I think the bird is coming to the net," he said, enigmatically.

"But we haven't any food for her!" Judy protested.

"No, my dear, we haven't. But by the same token, we couldn't let Mr. Wolkonsky know that we are as near starvation as he is. You stay here and receive Miss Arlundsen; you're old friends, I believe. I want a few words with Hassan."

"But suppose they rush out and attack us?"

Savidge shook his head. "Wolkonsky has passed his word, and nothing in this world or the next could make him break his pledge. While Miss Arlundsen is out here, Wolkonsky will not raise his finger against us."

Savidge and Hassan were deep in consulta-

tion when Lina Arlundsen appeared at the entrance of the first passage. Her face was pale and drawn, her eyes had a tired expression; but she nodded to Judy in her usual cool manner.

"I didn't expect to see you here," she said, easily.

"No, I suppose not," returned Judy, coldly. "I shouldn't think you would want to see me, after — after —"

Miss Arlundsen shrugged her shoulders. "Why not?" she asked, coolly.

"Because of those papers you stole from me," Judy flared.

"Stole? That is a hard word, Mrs. Savidge. But I suppose from your point of view you have a right to feel indignant. I dare say your husband does not look at in in so narrow a light."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just this: that what you call stealing I call duty, and that is what John Savidge

would call it, too. Steal? Bah! What do you know about the game? What do you know about big things?" She snapped her fingers disdainfully. "We're not playing this things for copecks or rubles, my dear. We're playing it for Empire."

"I don't understand," faltered Judy.

"No, of course you don't. Sometimes I don't understand it myself. I only know that all around me the greatest of all games is being played, with the whole world for a board and real kings and queens and knights for the chessmen. You and I are only pawns in the game, my dear, and we have no say as to where we shall be placed."

She sat down wearily on a block of stone. "I took your papers, Mrs. Savidge. That's what I was sent to the caravan for. I took your papers because it was a part of the game. I am not ashamed. Rather, I am proud of it as the most skillful piece of work I have ever done for the Service." A smile flickered across

her face. "Even M'sieu Jaggard complimented me on it, and I dare say you will agree with him, some day."

Judy looked at the face of the other woman and saw the pitiless sunlight bring out the hard and weary lines that her life had etched there; and in her heart there stirred an unwilling sort of admiration and undeniable pity. For, after all, this other woman was a fighter, too, and a good player of the game. And, furthermore, she did not look in that instant as if the playing had brought her a great deal of happiness.

"I think I understand you better than I did," Judy said, honestly. "But there is one thing I don't understand, and that is how you read the papers after you got them."

"The cipher?" Miss Arlundsen smiled again, this time showing the white line of her perfect teeth. "My dear Mrs. Savidge, that was the simplest part of the work. When I first saw you, I knew your husband must be very much in love with you; and when I

heard your name, ah, Judith is so pretty a name, you know! Woman-like, I jumped to a conclusion. By experimenting I found out my conclusion was right. Your husband had used your name as the keyword. It was merely a matter of intuition, you see."

"That's the way Mr. Jaggard figured it out," Judy admitted.

Lina Arlundsen elevated her eyebrows ever so slightly. "Mr. Jaggard is a very clever man," she said.

She stood up languidly, and put her hand to her head. "My eyes are torturing me," she said. "In my saddle-bags are some colored glasses. If you don't mind, I will get them and come back."

She swung across the stone plateau with her old familiar stride, and was almost at once lost to sight behind the mound where Wolkonsky's horses were picketed. Judy looked across to the Hall of One Hundred Columns, where her husband stood talking to Hassan. She saw Savidge glance once at Miss Arlund-

sen's retreating figure, and go on with his conversation. Judy sat down and looked across the Plain of Mervdasht. Near the horizon was a cloud of dust, and she wondered if it could be the Bakhtiari, or Jaggard coming back.

Her speculations were interrupted by the sharp, sudden sound of horse's hoofs clattering on the stone platform. As she sprang to her feet, she heard Savidge call out a command to halt, and the next instant Lina Arlundsen appeared from behind the mound, mounted and riding at a gallop straight for the Great Stairway. At her left Judy was aware of Savidge running across the plateau. He shouted out a second command to halt, to which the rider paid no attention. It was spectacular, blood-stirring—her splendid dash across the rock-strewn plateau. Savidge called to her once more; then, just before the horse reached the top of the Great Stairway, he raised his pistol and fired.



The horse fell . . . throwing the woman to the ground

At the report the horse stumbled, gave a leap forward, and then fell to its knees, throwing the woman to the ground. She fell on her head and lay quiet. Savidge ran up as the horse scrambled to its feet—the bullet had creased its shoulder—caught it by the bridle, ran it toward the Great Stairway, and sent it clattering down the steps. The loud rattle of its hoofs startled the doves from their nesting places in the Palace of Darius.

Judy ran towards the unconscious woman, as Savidge cried: "Search her, Judy!"

With one hand she unbuttoned the flannel blouse and with the other she searched beneath it. Just as Savidge hastened back to her, she straightened up with an exultant cry. Under Miss Arlundsen's blouse were folded a half dozen sheets of draughtsman's cloth. Judy pulled them out, and Savidge rapidly scanned them.

"They're all there—every one of my maps," he announced. Then he bent down

and examined the body, feeling the bones of the arms and legs, and putting his ear to the heart.

"A nasty fall, but no bones are broken," he said. "Judy, spread the blankets behind the propylæum. Hassan and I must get her out of sight at once. Under no circumstances must she be seen; for I have a notion it won't be long before our friends come up from below."

Savidge's words were prophetic. Less than an hour after Lina Arlundsen's dramatic attempt to escape from the Lost City, the flag of truce was again thrust out between the forelegs of the winged bull at the first entrance, and Wolkonsky made his second appearance. There was a cynical smile on his face as he greeted Savidge.

"There is no use of parleying," he said, bluntly. "You have lost the game, Monsieur Savidge."

"Quite so," agreed Savidge, in his most laconic voice.

"I kept my word," continued Wolkonsky. "I made no move while Mademoiselle Arlundsen was up here. But I did not pass my word that she should not escape with your maps."

"Quite so," said Savidge. "But how did you know she escaped?"

The Russian chuckled. "We heard her riding down the stairway."

Savidge smiled grimly. "That was clever, Wolkonsky—damn clever!"

The head of the Secret Service held out his hand.

"At any rate, Monsieur Savidge, you and I can shake hands. You know, there's nothing personal between us. Since that night at Samarkand, when you fought us single-handed, I have admired you more than any man I know. You've made life worth living for me. You've given me more trouble in the last few years than all the Nihilists in Russia, and personally there's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you."

"Thanks," said Savidge, dryly. "There's only one thing you can do for me — now."

"What is that?"

Savidge pointed to the belt around Wolkonsky's waist.

"My gun," he said.

"To be sure. I have carried it ever since that day at Tiflis."

He handed the belt to Savidge, who buckled it around his own waist. "Now I feel more like myself," the American said, gaily, patting the holster affectionately. "I didn't expect to get the old boy back till I got to Teheran — on official business."

The Russian smiled. "What do you say on these occasions? Ah, yes! Something about the plans of mice and men — is not that so?"

"We have a better one than that: To the victor belong the spoils. I congratulate you, Wolkonsky, and assure you I have no hard feelings. But the game isn't finished yet, and I have a fancy we shall meet again somewhere. Perhaps in Teheran — who knows?"

"Who knows?" answered the Russian, gravely.

A quarter of an hour later Savidge and Judy stood arm in arm at the head of the Great Stairway and watched Wolkonsky ride away. At the foot he turned and waved his hand to them, and they waved back. They might have been host and hostess speeding a parting guest. Savidge looked after him, and Judy saw his face wrinkle up in one of his rare, boyish smiles.

"I reckon the Chief won't be so jolly when he gets to Shiraz and looks for the lady," he chuckled. "And perhaps he won't be so friendly when we meet in Teheran on the first day of June!"

Judy looked at him with a puzzled expression in her eyes. "But the Company's paper — the bids and agreements, you know — what will you do about it? What did you do with it?"

"Gave it to Wolkonsky for safe keeping."

"What do you mean?"

Savidge looked down into his wife's round eyes and smiled. "I mean just what I say. When I was arrested in Tiflis I gave the paper to Wolkonsky to keep for me — only he didn't know it."

"You're not serious?"

"Never more serious in my life. Look here!" He unbuckled the gun-belt and opened the holster. "See that stitching?" he asked, pointing to a seam that ran around the top of the holster. "In reality there are two holsters, one sewed inside the other. The paper is between the inside and the outside leathers."

Judy gasped again. "And you handed it to him in Tiflis! Think of the chances you were taking!"

"My dear, haven't I told you that the man that never takes chances loses just as often as the man that does? It was the one thing I could do under the circumstances. Knowing Wolkonsky's reputation for keeping his word, I figured he would hand me over that gun

in Teheran if he once agreed to do so. So I took a chance on his guessing there was a paper sewed in the holster. In this game there's half in learning when to take a chance, you see."

It was late in the afternoon when Jaggard returned with food, leading Miss Arlundsen's horse, which he had picked up on the plain. The reason for his long delay, he explained, was a wide *détour* he had to make to escape a scouting party of Bakhtiari—probably the same party whose dust Judy saw near the horizon at the very time Lina Arlundsen made her attempt to escape. Savidge told him the story of the last few hours in a few words.

"Well, I'll be hornswoggled!" was his only comment. He walked away to pay a visit to Miss Arlundsen, who had regained consciousness soon after Wolkonsky left the Lost City, and was now recovering from her fall in the shade of the distant ruins.

In a few moments Jaggard came back to them. "The Lina lady has got a few beauty

marks on her face and a splitting headache; otherwise she's all right. She says she'll ride on to Shiraz tonight, with your permission."

"She can't go alone," said Savidge, "and I had planned to get a little sleep and set out for Isfahan at midnight. I can't afford to lose any more time."

"She isn't going alone," Jaggard replied, wrinkling his round face and pursing his lips. He stood in his old familiar attitude, legs wide apart, shoulders inclined slightly forward, thumbs hooked in the corner of his trousers pockets. A long, level ray of the setting sun fell on him, and once more Judy was reminded of the Yama Yama man.

"You don't mean—?" she began.

"I do," said Jaggard. "I'm on my way south to the Gulf, and Shiraz is one of the points of interest on the way."

"But we have counted on your going with us to Teheran."

Jaggard slowly shook his head. "You don't need me any more, Mrs. Savidge, and—and

don't you remember those lines you quoted up there at Akstafa?"

"For to admire and for to see,
For to be'old the world so wide,"

she repeated softly.

"Exactly," said Jaggard. "That fits me to a T. I've got to keep on going—I've got to see how the whole blooming world is made before I die. There's an old fakir waiting for me somewhere up the Bubbling Well Road. He's promised to show me his little bag o' tricks, and—and I'm overdue now."

Again from the top of the Stairway they watched the Great Jaggard ride away with Miss Arlundsén.

"The world is a very small place, Jaggard; we'll see you again," Savidge called after him.

"Oh, yes! Somewhere, when we're swinging 'round the circle, we'll meet up!" he replied, grinning back at them.

Judy gazed after the big red head of the Tramp Royal as he turned and rode off, and

she reflected with a little contraction of her heart that they should in all probability never see his friendly face again. They, too, were tramps, and they had no abiding place, no roof-tree whose hospitality they could offer to this other wanderer. As if he had read her thought, Savidge said:

“When we get a little house of our own, Judy, we’ll send out the word to Jaggard and have him come to see us. Shall we?”

She looked up at him quickly. “Oh! Shall we have a house—a really home?”

There was no mistaking the rapture in her voice.

“Why, Judy, you little hypocrite!” he laughed at her; “I thought you wanted to wander the rest of your life, never to live between walls or under a fixed roof?”

She looked away from him, across the great plain. The sun had set and the iridescent glory had faded from the world. It lay gray and lonely, already touched with the mystery of night. Among the ruins of the Palace of

Xerxes, Hassan was making tea over a tiny fire. Her eyes turned wistfully from the desert to the little homely spot of cheer where the Arab boiled his kettle.

“I want, first of all, to be with you, John,” she said, slowly. “If it means wandering, then I want to be a wanderer. But I should like, somewhere in the world, a little house that would be ours—yours and mine—to which we could go back sometimes, and where I could have you—safe.”

She hid her face against his shoulder. Putting up his hand, he felt her tears against his fingers.

“I know, I know,” he whispered, his lips touching her hair. “And where I could have you safe.”

They clung to each other for an instant; and then Savidge held her off and looked at her tenderly and gravely.

“There’s the work to be done, you know, Judy. I’ve won out so far, but the game’s not played down here, yet. I think we’ll put

the big road through, all right, but there'll still be fighting to do. I can't give it up till the last spike is driven, till I am sure the Bear has learned to keep her claws off. And then, after that, there'll be other work to do, maybe on the other side of the world. We're skirmishers ahead of the railroad, girl, you mustn't forget that; and when the big work calls I'll have to go."

Her eyes were steady and free from tears as she looked back at him. "I know. You've got to do your work. And when it calls, we'll go, *we*, you understand, John?"

He nodded his head slowly. "I would lay down my life to keep you safe, Judy; but I thank God you're the kind of woman that will fight with her man. We'll have a bungalow or two tucked away in the sweetest corners of the world, anywhere you choose, Japan, Ceylon, the South Seas, the East, America. And when the work lets us, we'll go home—we'll go home. And you can write your stories, volumes of 'em, Judy—what?"

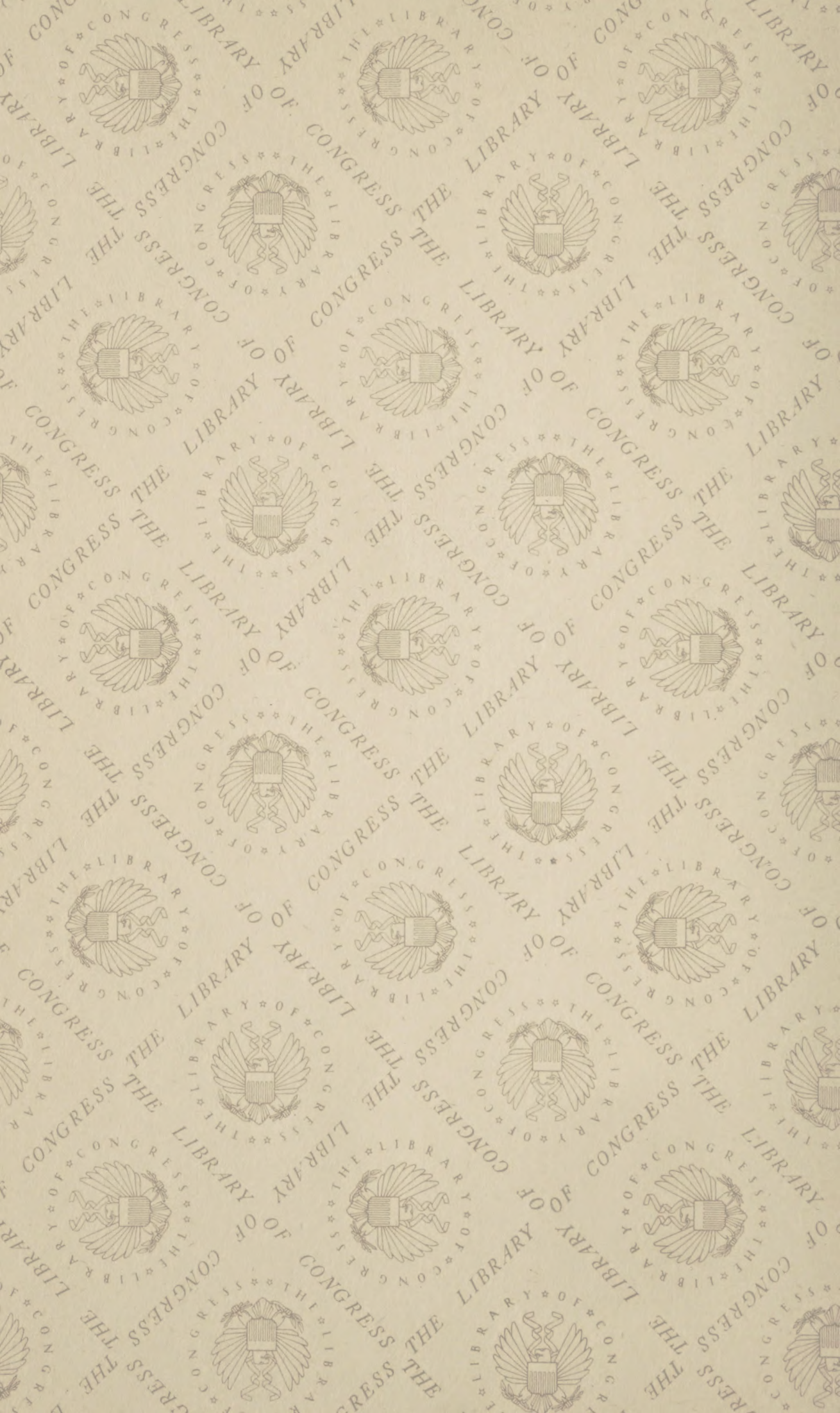
"Stories," she murmured, thoughtfully. "No, I don't believe I'll ever write another story. I don't have to, for I'm happy! And I'm living one that suits me better than any story I ever dreamed."

The moon was high in the heavens when they rode away from the Lost City. The sky burned with a fierce white fire and the plain of Mervdasht looked like a level sea in the silvery light. For a long time they rode heel to heel in silence. Then they checked their horses and turned for a last look at the City That Was. It lay squat on the horizon, lonely, silent, a derelict of Time.

"And now the journey really begins," Judy said, softly.

Savidge patted her hand. "You're wrong, my dear. The journey really ended back there in the Lost City, didn't it, Billy, old boy?"

But Billy only pricked up his ears and plodded on through the night.





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